

AFRICAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

Updated Response to COVID-19

31 May 2020

Metaphors often help us to understand what is going on around us. The partners at Praxis¹ provide a very useful metaphor for the current pandemic as “an economic and cultural blizzard, winter, and the beginning of a ‘little ice age’ – a once-in-a-lifetime change that is likely to affect our lives and organizations for years.”²

Of course, metaphors also have limitations. An obvious limitation in our context is that we are in a place that rarely freezes – so blizzards and harsh winters may be difficult to imagine. A comparable alternative has not been found. So, here’s an explanation...

A **blizzard** is a severe winter storm that comes in and can settle for a few days, even weeks. It’s impossible to see anything outside and the right response is to shelter with what you have.

We know **winter**, at least the mild winters of Eswatini. But a real winter – in places where there are blizzards – is no laughing matter. You wear protective clothing, multiple layers all day, and you must prepare for the challenges of snowbanks and ice. Winter doesn’t last for only a few hours or days; it is a season that lasts for months and sometimes longer than we can handle.

Winter does end, though, most of the time. But sometimes, the climate is affected, and the blizzard brought us into winter and winter leaves us in a **Little Ice Age**. Things don’t work the way they did before – last spring is a memory. The snow doesn’t melt away, the flowers don’t return the same way. A Little Ice Age can last for years and change our world in permanent ways.

At the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic, we responded as if we were preparing for a *blizzard* – quickly get sheltered and safe. Even though we were already hearing it was likely to last longer, in our hearts we felt like this was a blizzard and it would soon end. Like many countries and communities, Eswatini and African Christian College both went into lockdown.

But the consensus of global experts is that, short of a miracle (which we pray for but don’t plan for), the threat of COVID19 will remain globally for at least 12 more months until we have a vaccine.³ This assumes amazing speed from the scientific community since no successful vaccine has been produced in less than 4 years, but the operating assumption is we may have one for this coronavirus within 18 months.⁴ This is our winter.

And even then, our world will have changed, and the Little Ice Age will be ahead.

¹ Praxis describes itself as “a creative engine for redemptive entrepreneurship.” <https://journal.praxislabs.org/>

² <https://journal.praxislabs.org/strategies-for-winter-redemptive-leadership-in-survival-times-f15a7791035a> (23 April 20)

³ Widely reported, for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/19/coronavirus-vaccine-when-will-we-have-one>; <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/15/21255817/coronavirus-vaccines-treatments-development-timeline>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/30/opinion/coronavirus-covid-vaccine.html> (30 April 20)

African Christian College responded quickly to the coming blizzard and winter. Over 90% of the respondents to a recent community feedback survey praised the response so far.⁵ The community has been adequately protected and nurtured. And after nine weeks of lockdown, some want to declare that both the blizzard and winter is over – it’s time to return to normal. But that’s not the way it works. Winter cannot be rushed just because we’re tired of it. We can pretend it’s gone, but we’ll be awfully cold without our jersey.

The question we’re trying to answer is what it looks like for African Christian College to prepare for the Little Ice Age while surviving the winter (if the blizzard is even gone). Or, how do we manage the risk and well-being of our community? Our short-term extensions and step-approach to decision making based on feelings and pressure is not an effective strategy to continue. It’s time to be more proactive.

In summary, we are extending our campus lockdown until at least 31 July 2020. That is nine more weeks – this is our lockdown mid-point.

It is unhelpful to debate this proposal without understanding the rationale – otherwise you might think we’re acting out of fear, selfishness, or a lack understanding. And it would be useless to argue the proposal without identifying the assumptions, information, and thinking that leads to a different conclusion. We must move beyond *hunches* or desires to clear thinking. So, this is a sketch of the thinking behind this decision.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. First two theological misconceptions about the pandemic that we refuse to accept:

COVID19 is not God’s punishment on humanity for sin. Though the Bible offers examples of God using oppressive regimes⁶ or earth-swallowing holes⁷ to punish or teach the people of God, and though all of humanity could be considered God’s people, this is not consistent with how God worked those events and it is a poor explanation for the problem of why bad things happen.⁸ Our broken and fallen world, a result of the Fall, leaves us with sickness and death until the full restoration of all things with the return of our King Jesus.⁹

Our safety is not a measure of our faith. People of great, Christian faith around the world are sick and have died. Faith is not a magic pill to keep one from getting sick or not dying. Jesus was tempted to rely on God to protect him by taking a risky and deadly chance . . . but he replied, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:7, KJV).¹⁰ The Bible never promises that following Jesus means we’ll be safe, happy, or healthy. Instead, Jesus says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24, NIV).

⁵ Feedback survey on 27 May 2020 sent to all ACC students, residents, & staff

⁶ For instance, Babylon – one reference for example: Isaiah 47:6

⁷ In Numbers 16, rebelling families were swallowed up after challenging God’s authority in Moses

⁸ McKnight (23 Mar 20): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/march/god-and-virus.html>

⁹ Edmiston (27 May 20): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/may/did-god-give-us-coronavirus.html>

¹⁰ Jesus is quoting Deut 6:16 about the Israelites complaining about God not providing them with water in the desert. So, both the OT and NT use of this command directly applies to testing God for providing for health.

2. Faith is more than believing in facts, it is following King Jesus in our actions and lives. Faith is the way of life in allegiance rather than idolatry. An idol we face in this situation is the idol of control and power. We want to return to “normal,” to our plans, our routines, our ways of life before coronavirus. Before, we had control of our lives and what we did . . . and we want it back. **Seeking the idol of control is not faith.** This desire for control is our fear speaking up, showing us how much we like to rely on our own ways, plans, thinking, and desires rather than trusting God through the new, difficult situation.
3. As Christians, we join Jesus in the work of restoring all the broken things (Col 1:20; Acts 3:21). The “normal” we crave is not restoration, it is moving backward. For example, the pandemic highlights many problems in our world we have ignored or failed to address – lack of clean water at up to a third of Eswatini schools¹¹, the plague of alcohol-related trauma¹², poverty’s curse on the most vulnerable during crisis, and the lack of adequate healthcare.¹³ Our faith should push us forward to a new that reflects not our return to the past, but the redemption of the world. **Faith doesn’t take us back to the way things were before.** Faith is knowing that we have been called the children of God for a purpose – so that it will be “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Our faith is demonstrated in our continued commitment to follow our King in the mission of restoration . . . not in a rush to get back to be in control ourselves.
4. As followers of Jesus, we ask the questions of how we love like Jesus loved. Jesus sacrificed himself so that others might have life. Jesus taught us to love God and love neighbour. As we think about lockdown, we are reminded that **the most loving thing we can do** right now is to practice extreme physical distancing so that as many as possible might be saved.
5. Every Christian is a steward of the resources entrusted to them by God. In thinking about the stewardship of our campus, farm, resources, and the lives entrusted into our care, leaders at African Christian College have an **important stewardship task.**

In the current situation, being overprotective or extra-cautious is not a sign of fear or of a lack of faith. It is responsible stewardship, trusting in God’s movement to do something new, and looking ahead at what is possible with God instead of striving to return to the idol of control.

MISSION-ALIGNMENT

6. *The mission of African Christian College is to glorify God by equipping students for excellent service in God’s Kingdom.* For us, that looks like accomplishing our five Ends: academic excellence, Christian character, servant leadership, global awareness, and personal resourcefulness. Though our normal tactics have been severely limited by the pandemic and lockdown, **reopening campus will not aid us toward our mission.**
7. How we respond and lead during this time – even through this process of transparency and communication about how and why decisions were made – we model, teach, and

¹¹ <https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-wash>

¹² The lockdown bans on alcohol in South Africa opened over 5,000 hospital beds and reduced weekly alcohol-related trauma from 34,000 cases per week to 12,000. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52358268>

¹³ One example of documentation on this issue is this peer-reviewed, 6 May 2020 article on emergency healthcare in Eswatini: <https://bmcemergmed.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12873-020-00327-w>; The government has publicly acknowledged this repeatedly since the beginning of the COVID19 outbreak.

prepare students for excellent service. Leaders are always being watched, and **this is an important time to lead and model** integrity, courage, and informed decision-making.

8. Our **online classes** have allowed us to continue our primary educational mission. Our academic team is finalizing plans for the remainder of 2020 to be taught online. Even if in-person schooling is allowed again, lecturer travel to campus is unlikely and strains our ability to teach this year's courses.
9. We need to improve delivering on our mission in the pandemic, particularly with online classes. But **reopening campus does not offer a solution of improving on mission delivery**, especially considering the consequences of reopening.¹⁴

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

10. "**First, do no harm.**"¹⁵ As the leaders, caretakers, and *in loco parentis* of the people who chose to remain on our campus when given the opportunity, we have a responsibility to protect them from harm. Safety has been and continues to be a high priority.

We should not entrust safety to a weak (though improving), local healthcare system. We must take effective measures to protect those in our care. In times of great trouble – when the vulnerable are most at risk, it is institutions (not individuals) that best provide safety.¹⁶ We have a task to provide safety for our community, which requires the cooperation of everyone in the community.

11. We should consider what will produce the **greatest good for the greatest number.**¹⁷ Any claim of infringement on "personal rights" reflects a misunderstanding of how the virus works and opposes what it means to live in community. My "rights" (which is usually my "wants") does not override the community's right to be safe and protected from danger if I am part of that community.
12. Moving away from Western ethical theories, *ubuntu* is often a focus of African ethics. Ujomudike lists the common values of *ubuntu* as "reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, emphasis on human dignity, and the value of human life as well as consensus, tolerance, and mutual respect."¹⁸ **Ubuntu leads to the same response: the safety of the community overrides my individual desires to go out if that puts the community life at risk.** In this situation, what it means to love your neighbour, to seek the common good, and to value human life is to stay at home to protect those on- and off-campus.

Interestingly, there is also pre-colonial era evidence that African cultures (Shona, specifically) practiced extreme physical distancing and quarantines when faced with severe disease outbreaks hundreds of years ago. The wisdom of physical distancing is not limited to modern science, but human ingenuity from our ancestors.¹⁹

¹⁴ These consequences are covered in the sections below.

¹⁵ A traditional ethical guideline for medical practitioners and caretakers from Ancient Greece.

¹⁶ The primary lesson learned from Timothy Snyder's deeply researched *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (Tim Duggan Books, 2016).

¹⁷ Basics of the Utilitarianism ethical theory. <https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/utilitarianism>

¹⁸ Ujomudike (2016): https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-09483-0_428

¹⁹ "How ancient African societies used social distancing to manage pandemics" (Chirikure, 18 May 20): <https://qz.com/africa/1858278/how-ancient-african-societies-managed-pandemics-like-spanish-flu/>

13. **Our campus is not a prison.** No one is trapped here. Everyone has been given the chance to leave and still has an opportunity to leave at any time. Several made that choice at the beginning, and several (even those deemed essential to stay) have left since the beginning. Those who remained agreed to act in ways that serves the community rather than self.
14. **We don't have a right to a freedom to come and go from campus as we please.** The housing, food, and work offered to employees and students at African Christian College are blessings as being part of this community and institution. Sometimes, we forget the blessings and start to see them as our entitlements. But the resources of the college – including the homes we live in – are private property that belongs to the institution, not its residents.

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

15. What is the difference between a *partial* lockdown and a *full* lockdown?

The *partial* lockdown in Eswatini says that only workers in essential industries (providing food, international trade) should be back at work, some other businesses are open for limited hours/days each week, and everyone is continuously urged to stay at home. The gradual easing of the lockdown opened up some businesses, but extended the stay-at-home orders from the government.²⁰ The government has asked businesses who can keep people working at home to do so and for everyone to limit travel to essential medical services, securing essential goods, or to approved work.

The *full* lockdown on campus is consistent with the country's partial lockdown: those needing necessary medical services go out, essential goods are brought in, we work from home, and we limit the number of people going out for the good of everyone (on- and off-campus). At the same time, we average half a dozen or more campus residents leaving campus every week – that is not a full lockdown. **There is little substantive difference between what we are doing on campus and what the government has put in place.**

16. The gradual reopening of the economy is an economically-driven decision to ensure that as many people as possible are able to earn money for essential goods because the country “does not have the financial muscle” to provide much financial assistance to companies or individuals during the crisis.²¹ It is a decision based on balancing economic need for those struggling to survive with the risk of illness.

The overwhelming majority of people on campus are not “struggling for survival” for food or needing to get back to work in the economy. (And those few have the resources to make it work from outside campus.) **The concern for safety is still valid and the necessary reopening of the economy is not applicable to our situation.**

²⁰ PM (15 May 20): <https://twitter.com/EswatiniGovern1/status/1261365414803599360>; (25 May), PM urged emaSwati to remain at home: <https://twitter.com/EswatiniGovern1/status/1264833439104147456>; again 29 May, PM said “no unnecessary travel” <https://twitter.com/EswatiniGovern1/status/1266401004884496386> the daily Ministry of Health reports emphasise that most cases are asymptomatic and people need to comply with lockdown (@EswatiniGovern1).

²¹ PM Statement on Partial Lockdown Extension (15 Apr 20): <http://www.gov.sz/index.php/latest-news/204-latest-news/2437-partial-lockdown-extension-covid-19-15-april>

17. **“But everyone else is doing it.”** Just because other people are neither honouring the law nor their neighbour does not make it justifiable or wise. To use the selfish behaviour of those ignoring the safety instructions from health experts and the government as reason for reopening is not morally, ethically, or theologically justifiable.

This quote from *The Atlantic* summarises the ethical, political, and psychological factors at play in this rationale: “Prevention is physically rewarding in the long term, but not emotionally rewarding in the short term. People who stay home won’t feel a pleasant dopamine kick from their continued health. Those who flock together will feel hugs and sunshine. The former will be tempted to join the latter. The media could heighten that temptation by offering what Lincoln calls ‘disparity in spectacle.’ Fringe exceptions like anti-lockdown protests and packed restaurants, she says, are more dramatic and telegenic than people responsibly staying at home, and so more likely to be covered. The risk is that rare acts of incaution will seem like normal behaviour.”²²

18. As a Christian institution, we must model appropriate **obedience to government authorities** (Romans 13:1-7). We want to teach responsible action that knows when to disobey authority (injustice; against God’s commands) and when it is appropriate to obey.²³ The lockdowns are not unjust or against God; the lockdowns are love of neighbour.
19. Africa is one of the great success stories of COVID19 responses. It is sad that the global media isn’t recognizing this²⁴, but it is even sadder that Africans themselves don’t recognise the ways they are effectively fighting the spread. Practicing extreme physical distancing through coordinated lockdowns to flatten the curve (which means the situation lasts much longer, that was all part of the deal) is working! Instead, some see the slow spread as reason to believe it’s time to return to normal. This becomes especially true when we use faulty logic to argue that “it’s not as bad as some places.”

While the lockdowns are working to flatten the curve, the spread continues. So far this week, Eswatini has confirmed 16% of its total cases. Beginning five days after the ‘gradual reopening of the economy’, new cases began to rise again.²⁵ **To reopen and act as if the virus is under control is counterproductive to the success of the past nine weeks.** The only effective strategy available is extreme physical distancing – that has not changed since the beginning. What has changed is our belief in our ability to do it.

²² Yong (*The Atlantic*, 20 May 20): <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/patchwork-pandemic-states-reopening-inequalities/611866/>

²³ Biblical examples of God-followers in the exile are instructive; “Civil Disobedience in an Age of Coronavirus” (8 May 20): <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2020/civil-disobedience-in-an-age-of-coronavirus>

²⁴ “Africa is a coronavirus success story so far, if only the world would notice” (*World Politics Review*, 20 May 20): <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28776/africa-is-a-coronavirus-success-story-so-far-if-only-the-world-would-notice>

²⁵ 45 new cases of 283 total: <https://twitter.com/EswatiniGovern1/status/1266046483943624708>. Since 20 May, daily cases continue to be consistently higher than the average before 15 May 2020. Through Friday of this week, the average age of new cases is 25, with only two cases over age 40. A third of the total cases are people aged 30-39. The current spread, then, reflects the ages of our current residents.

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

20. Our main economic endeavour is macadamia farming. It continues in the lockdown.
Reopening does not allow us to significantly improve our Tree of Life work.
21. Our **employees continue to be paid** (even at home). Students can work and study.
22. **Locavore does not offer reasonable concerns for reopening campus.** It already operates at a loss, so to reopen campus for a business that already operates at a loss is counterproductive to savings. Furthermore, there is a current lack of products (no eggs, limited produce). Alternative ordering and pick-up have been successfully implemented which minimises the negative impact of it closing.
23. Over 85% of our students remain on campus. **Lockdown has not negatively impacted expected income of student fees**, which are already highly subsidised.
24. **Lockdown creates a financial strain on the current budgets.** This could be a reason to completely terminate the lockdown (but there seems to be little support for this). Paying workers at home while also paying students substantially more is an unexpected financial burden. This could be addressed through a combination of (a) reduced pay for at-home workers, (b) fundraising efforts (currently underway), and (c) implementing other cost-saving measures.
25. **To reopen campus increases costs to maintain compliance.** Best practices and compliance with Eswatini laws will require reorganizing work areas (possibly adding plexiglass screens) and processes (particularly in nut processing and at the gate), much more disinfecting (products and time), and protective gear.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

26. Mental health professionals around the world are reporting increased need related to the pandemic and its lockdowns.²⁶ So many people are showing symptoms of depression that psychologists are trying to distinguish who really is depressed and who is just part of a “new normal” of pandemic-induced depression.²⁷ A lockdown of campus, therefore, is not primarily responsible for those who are struggling, but the pandemic, loss of “normal,” and countrywide restrictions are all contributing factors. Survey respondents who reported not coping well were more likely to advocate for reopening, but **this assumption that reopening campus will remove our coping challenges is wishful thinking that will not resolve the challenge.**
27. At the same time, we need to improve supporting our community, especially those who are not coping well. 25 out of 42 feedback respondents (60%) said they were coping well; 6 strongly agreed; 4 strongly disagreed. **This improvement needs to happen whether we reopen or not.**
28. **Reopening may do more psychological harm than good.** People are afraid of the virus: 24 of 41 respondents (58%) agreed that they were afraid to go out; 6 strongly agreed; 11 strongly disagreed. Only four people marked negatively (slightly disagree)

²⁶ “UN leads call to protect most vulnerable from mental health crisis during and after COVID-19” (UN; 14 May 20): <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063882>

²⁷ “Is Everyone Depressed?” (*The Atlantic*, 22 May 20):

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/depression-coronavirus/611986/>

that the lockdown has helped them feel safe while 24/41 strongly agreed it has. Removing the protection our lockdown provides will likely increase anxiety and fear in our community. This increased anxiety could overwhelm any gains from reopening.

29. **The idea of things being “normal” and being back in control without lockdown is a false narrative.** When we realise that the world didn’t return to the way it was before the lockdown because we reopened, will we feel better ... or even worse?
30. **Longer extensions may decrease anxiety.** By extending the lockdown for a longer period than one or two weeks, we can help alleviate the disappointment and anxiety that results from each extension. The repeated cycle of expectation followed by disappointment is stressful and frustrating. Being clear about the realities of the situation and what to expect helps everyone begin accepting the situation and develop better coping skills than hope that the next deadline will be the last one.

HEALTH PERSPECTIVE ON TIMING

31. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended guidelines for the timing of relaxing lockdowns and community reopening.²⁸ These are based on their epidemiological expertise. Some places are not abiding by the recommendations because of political and/or economic factors. That does not disprove the reality of the situation or diminish the recommendations they offer.

The CDC provides six “gates” to pass through for transitioning through reopening. One is a downward trajectory of new cases over 14 days, another is a downward trajectory of percentage of new cases over 14 days.²⁹ Both assume that testing levels are constant or increasing. This metric seems to be a standard metric for assessing the virus’s spread. **Eswatini’s reported cases do not reflect readiness.**³⁰ The Ministry of Health began emphasizing recoveries over the past month, which is encouraging, but not a metric for assessing spread.

32. Eswatini has not released any information on its own benchmarks, response levels, or detailed plans for the gradual reopening. What has been released indicates that the country will be in its current gradual response phases for at least another year.³¹ This leaves institutions in the dark about the reality of the local problems and about what to expect in the coming weeks and months. **The proper response is not waiting on the government but making our own plans** to accomplish our mission and steward our resources with what we do know.

²⁸ The epidemiological principles of this USA guide applies globally: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf>

²⁹ Ibid., CDC guidelines, p7

³⁰ 16% of Eswatini’s cases are from this week; upward trajectory began 20 May 20 (linked earlier)

³¹ Following WHO guidelines, Eswatini announced COVID19 phases (currently in phases 1-2) but moving to phase 3 requires widespread testing, 4 a cure/vaccine (12+ months away), 5 no new infections which leads to a complete ease of restrictions: <https://twitter.com/EswatiniGovern1/status/1258774015927353344>

HEALTH PERSPECTIVE ON CAMPUS SAFETY

33. **Some professionals have said that college campuses are ideal environments for the spread of the current coronavirus.**³² That is not surprising. The close living quarters, frequent interactions, and community life encourage contact and, therefore, spread. Naturally, how one institution responds to protect and manage the crisis (and the eventual cases) will vary by location, the local outbreak, and institutional stability – we must assess from our own context and situation.³³
34. **All expert guidance for schools, businesses, and institutions require more stringent and comprehensive changes on campus if we choose to reopen.**³⁴
35. The American College Health Association’s publication³⁵ for reopening higher education institutions provides many recommendations. **These would be difficult to fully meet.** A few of the recommendations include:
- a. Students should not share bedrooms.
 - b. Students should not share bathrooms – or severely limit number sharing.
 - c. Access control, physically spaced, limited seating, mask-wearing, and come in same groups each time for meals in campus dining
 - d. Increased cleaning and disinfection (at least daily) of all living, studying, and working space, all over campus
 - e. Requirement of face coverings in common areas
 - f. Visitor restrictions
 - g. Two metre physical distancing always. Recommended that environments are set up with immovable furniture that is already spaced, or to mark distances for lines, seating, etc.
 - h. Prioritise face-to-face teaching to courses that require in-person learning (like science labs) and do as much as possible in alternative methods (like online).
 - i. Severe limitations on extra-curricular activities or campus gatherings.
 - j. If in-person teaching in class, limit class size, length of time, and nature of activities; provide symptom monitoring, distancing; increase air filtering or flow in all rooms. (All morning classes in the Education Centre will not meet guidelines).

³² “Colleges are deluding themselves” (*The Atlantic*, 15 May 20):

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/colleges-that-reopen-are-making-a-big-mistake/611485/> citing a working paper (March 2020): <https://osf.io/6kuet/> whose author summarized: “The ‘small-worlds’ network on college campuses create fertile social conditions for an epidemic spread, even if only consider the connections among students created through courses”

(<https://twitter.com/WeedenKim/status/1249324100688007168>); ACHA link below

³³ “Does Anthony Fauci Think Colleges Should Reopen? We Asked Him.” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 May 20): <https://www.chronicle.com/article/does-anthony-fauci-think/248839>

³⁴ Eswatini Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Trade: <http://www.gov.sz/index.php/commerce-minister-speeches>; WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/guidance-for-schools-workplaces-institutions>; Africa CDC (26 May 20): <https://africacdc.org/download/covid-19-guidance-for-educational-settings/>; OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

³⁵ “Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era” (7 May 20):

https://www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Considerations_for_Reopening_IHEs_in_the_COVID-19_Era_May2020.pdf

36. **Similar restrictions and expectations are in place for workplaces** and small businesses that would lead to changes in workplace practices, set-up, and processes in the library, all offices, Locavore, and especially the farmhouse.³⁶ This is beyond masks; for instance, local legal compliance includes social distancing that is “not negotiable.”³⁷
37. There is a push by international organisations like UNESCO for reopening schools as quickly as possible – even during the crisis³⁸. There is good reason for this advocacy, but it does not apply to our situation and must be understood in context.

There is scientific evidence that children are less likely to contract the virus and that they are not good carriers of the virus to others.³⁹ WHO and CDC guidance note that this should not be applied to high school students because no evidence supports their reduced risk.

Similar to countries easing restrictions for economic reasons, these groups are advocating reopening schools because many children throughout the world rely on schools for their only meals and school is a place of safety for them – it is survival-driven.⁴⁰

Clearly, **these factors do not apply to our situation**: college students are not children, their physical needs are already being met, and they are continuing their studies. From my perspective, this would also be true for our children on campus – though they would greatly benefit from some structured learning during our lockdown that should be considered and would likely benefit them beyond even returning to schools if prematurely reopened.

38. **Temperature checks is not testing; it is helpful in monitoring potential cases.**⁴¹ Daily temperature monitoring is a good practice we must continue. Not every case shows fever early (or ever),⁴² and it should be partnered with symptom checking.⁴³ Though temperature monitoring is helpful, it is not a test for COVID19.⁴⁴ Its practice makes people feel better, but its value is exaggerated by those who argue for reopening claiming we already do daily “testing” on campus.
39. **Masks are unproven protection.** Masks are intended to reduce the spread of the virus from infected individuals to others. They likely help protect the uninfected from contracting the virus, but the recommendation for wearing masks is not to keep from getting it, it's to keep from spreading it. This distinction is important because

³⁶ See point 34

³⁷ Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Trade: <http://www.gov.sz/index.php/commerce-minister-speeches>

³⁸ “Reopening schools: When, where, and how?” (UNESCO, 13 May 20): <https://en.unesco.org/news/reopening-schools-when-where-and-how>; “How can schools open up again safely? The UN has some new guidelines” (UN, 30 Apr 20): <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062902>;

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ WHO: <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/updated-who-recommendations-for-international-traffic-in-relation-to-covid-19-outbreak>; “Why screening for fevers won’t be enough to catch coronavirus cases” (ABC News, 17 Apr 20): <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/screening-fevers-catch-coronavirus-cases/story?id=70199490>; “Thermal scanner technology may not detect COVID-19 infections” (Washington Post, 11 May 20): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/05/11/thermal-scanners-are-latest-technology-being-deployed-detect-coronavirus-they-dont-really-work/>

⁴² *Ibid*; Also, daily Eswatini Ministry of Health updates note large number of asymptomatic cases

⁴³ See WHO and OSHA guidelines

⁴⁴ *ibid*

misunderstanding this may lead to a belief that masks are effective protection (similar to a condom for reducing HIV). Maybe it is, but there is no clear, scientific evidence to support masks as a high level of protection.⁴⁵ Mask wearing becomes necessary in an open community, but not in a closed community (like the private home, or a place on lockdown) unless someone is experiencing COVID19-related symptoms.⁴⁶ Outside of physical distancing, wearing masks is an additional measure to attempt to reduce spread, but it is not an effective substitute for it. In the guidelines for businesses and schools to reopen, masks are recommended in certain situations – but never as the primary tool for safety; consistently as the last line of defence after better solutions are in place.⁴⁷ The recent push for masks is creating a false sense of security as our communities work through the long winter ahead.

40. **Reopening campus leads to a result that most would find undesirable.**⁴⁸ Regardless of how reopening is envisioned, the consequences are the same. Whether a complete end to the lockdown or loosened restrictions for more freedom to go to town, the result is more restrictions. When we start increasing the number of people who come and go from campus, we raise our risk level beyond a comfortable level to continue the way we currently operate; we will no longer be an isolated homestead.

This means mandatory masks outside of the home for everyone all the time, more physical distancing, possible restrictions for kids playing together, less people on sorting table, no use of buses (or major changes to usage), assigning dorm bathrooms, staying in cohorts for getting meals, no sports, increased work to clean all of campus daily, no visitors in other people's homes, and similar measures. Already, 5-10% of our campus leaves campus each week – which means up to a quarter of our campus could be in the 14-day risk window at any given time. Loosening restrictions means fully adopting and complying to all safety requirements and implementing as many recommendations as possible. That is the only responsible and ethical response for our community. In the end, to accommodate the few wanting the freedom to go out, the last of our campus freedom vanishes. That seems undesirable.

The above points are an attempt to think critically about our response from various points of reference. It shows how that thinking led to the conclusions: (1) that the lockdown is working well for most of us and for African Christian College; (2) the virus is still actively spreading locally; (3) that it makes sense to look longer than to continue with short extensions when things are no longer rapidly changing; and (4) that reopening will be harder emotionally, physically, and financially than not reopening. Altogether, that leads to the decision that we maintain a lockdown on campus until at least 31 July 2020.

⁴⁵ "Reports on face masks' effectiveness for Covid-19 divides scientists" (*The Guardian*, 4 May 20):

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/04/scientists-disagree-over-face-masks-effect-on-covid-19>

⁴⁶ WHO guidance: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

⁴⁷ See WHO and OSHA guidelines

⁴⁸ It's pretty safe to say this since the majority of survey respondents opposed ending the lockdown. Those who advocated loosening restrictions were mostly staff and *off-campus* students.

REVISIONS TO THE LOCKDOWN

In addition to this extension – essentially doubling our lockdown time so far – the following changes to our practices will be implemented:

- A. Maintain daily temperature monitoring. Begin a process for symptom monitoring.
- B. Maintain visitor restrictions.
- C. Expect everyone to stay on campus except for reasonable & necessary medical attention.
- D. Restrict use of indoor spaces (Education Centre and Library) for meetings, study, and gatherings because the evidence shows indoors as the most dangerous.⁴⁹
- E. Maintain hand-washing stations.
- F. Increase promotion of good hygiene, safety practices, and coping skills.
- G. Continue preparedness for positive cases on campus.
- H. Create a new system for shopping to eliminate the on-campus shoppers, except for limited times when shopping is problem-solving difficult to delegate. This could save us money by keeping employees at work and saving mileage costs.

We plan to partner with Duo Do Eatery for our shopping needs outside since they already shop and deliver food to campus regularly for the cafeteria. Ordering and logistics from campus will now be coordinate by Ncobile Dlamini in the Admin office.

- I. By tightening up the lockdown and knowing it will last for nine more weeks, we will relax some restrictions. We will act more like a safe homestead during this time. We expect this to be more effective at alleviating the anxiety and psychological toll of the lockdown than reopening campus. These changes include:
 - a. Host our weekly worship gatherings
 - b. Allow sports on campus
 - c. Allow limited meal seating in the cafeteria
 - d. Allow outdoor gatherings
 - e. Make masks optional
 - f. However, limit participation in these activities to those who have stayed on campus. Those who have left campus for whatever reason will not be able to participate in sports, gatherings, and some work tasks for 14 days and should wear a mask when out of their room.
- J. We will allow student return to campus if they desire no later than 4 June. Those who return will be quarantined together for 14 days before returning to community life.
- K. Because it has gotten cold, work will not begin until 7:30 AM starting 1 June 2020.

⁴⁹ Erin Brommage (<https://www.erinbrommage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>), citing non-peer-reviewed research (<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.04.20053058v1>). This is new and unevaluated research and shouldn't be taken mean everything outside is fine.