

Guidelines for COVID-19 Communication by UConn Managers

As the global crisis of COVID-19 continues to evolve by the hour and its impact grows at UConn and throughout the state of Connecticut, maintaining timely and coordinated communications to the university's myriad audiences is vital. At the heart of any optimal emergency management situation is keeping people informed, calm, and connected to the university community in a way that is consistent, consolidated, and easy to receive.

To date, the university's executive policy group (EPG), which is led by the president and the UConn Office of Emergency Management and includes most cabinet members and senior university leaders, has coordinated all pertinent public information and community messages through University Communications and the Office of the President. To that end, all information on the COVID-19 website is vetted through Vice President for Communications Tysen Kendig and Senior Advisor to the President Mike Kirk on behalf of the EPG.

This information has been disseminated through a single, consolidated COVID-19 website, a daily digest of key updates affecting broad sections of the university community, occasionally campus-wide messages, and social media support. These efforts have been closely mirrored for the UConn Health community, which has additional needs for patients and healthcare providers.

It is understandable that individual units throughout campus would wish to create their own communication vehicles to reach their audiences. Such efforts, while not generally encouraged, are permissible under the extreme circumstances faced, but with certain guidelines that are grounded in best practices for effective, streamlined emergency communications.

Content

Content developed by individual UConn units should not make interpretations of content being pushed out on the main COVID-19 site or daily email digest. Rather, it should clearly refer to and reinforce messages sent by university leadership, linking directly to content on the main COVID-19 site whenever possible.

More than ever, the situation requires one unified message from the top of the organization. Specific implications of policies and guidelines for particular units is appropriate, but subjective assessments of guidance being unilaterally distributed threatens confusion and misinformation. As such, questions about local unit implications of university policies and guidance should be reviewed with a cabinet level supervisor before dissemination.

Websites

The university is operating a single, official website which is serving as a clearinghouse for all COVID-19 information and announcements. This is the primary source of information for internal and external constituents and is the first and only outlet updated by University Communication staff immediately as new or changing information arises. It is directly linked to a parallel site serving the UConn Health community, also managed by University Communications.

Any secondary COVID-19 web site must very visibly at the header of any content section link to the university's main COVID-19 page with a contextual descriptor of that site, consistent with best practices for crisis communications and by peer institutions. A contextual descriptor should read as follows:

UConn Coronavirus (COVID-19) Updates

The worldwide pandemic involving COVID-19 (coronavirus) has produced unprecedented challenges in the UConn community and around the world. These unusual circumstances create significant uncertainty and unease in the professional and personal lives of our students, employees, alumni, and others throughout UConn Nation.

The latest official guidance and updates on UConn's response to COVID-19 and its impact on the university community is being provided in real time at <https://uconn.edu/public-notification/coronavirus/>.

Other guidelines for secondary site content include:

- Information should not re-purpose content from the main COVID-19 page, unless via direct link. As information is changing in real time, the university is not in a position to update multiple websites in a timely fashion, so links to institutional information and guidance on the main page is essential.
- As previously indicated under the "Content" heading, information should not provide interpretations of university policies or guidelines presented on the main page or provided by central administration, but can provide how such policies or guidance directly impacts the unit.

At present, University Communications is not in a position to support development of new websites geared toward providing COVID-19 updates. Web development resources are on 24/7 standby to prioritize support for changing and emerging University- and UConn Health-level web content and delivery needs.

Alert Banner

Custom alert banners related to COVID are not permissible at this time; rather, anyone wanting to use an alert banner must use the one provided by ITS that is consistent throughout the university. We encourage departments to link to content specific to their school in another prominent content block on their homepage.

Emails

As a push compliment to the website, University Communications has been issuing a daily email digest of all broad audience communication items, each with a headline and brief descriptive passage, as a concise, packaged alternative to numerous detailed email messages to the entire university community. These messages go to all individuals with a uconn.edu email account.

Individual units are free to communicate as needed to their own constituencies with pertinent information, consistent with the guidelines previously issued under "Content." However, units are cautioned that given the considerable flow of information from the university, state and federal government, and mainstream media, a "less is more" approach to mass email distribution should be kept in mind. It is for this reason that the university ceased multiple mass emails each day barring a major development arising, instead opting for a daily digest of updates that audiences can expect at the end of each business day.