

Case Study: The University of South Florida Uses Appian CampusPass to Assist with Reopening for Fall Semester

By: [Connie Moore](#)



The Essentials

Who: University of South Florida (USF), with 55,000+ students and 15,000+ faculty and staff at campuses in Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota-Manatee

Challenge: How to safely reopen the campus for the fall 2020 semester in the midst of COVID-19

Technology solution: Deployed CampusPass, Appian's Workforce Safety Solution for Education, configured to the university's specific needs, in combination with USF Dean of Public Health's guidance and recommended public health measures such as reduced in-person classroom and dorm capacity, and increased remote instruction



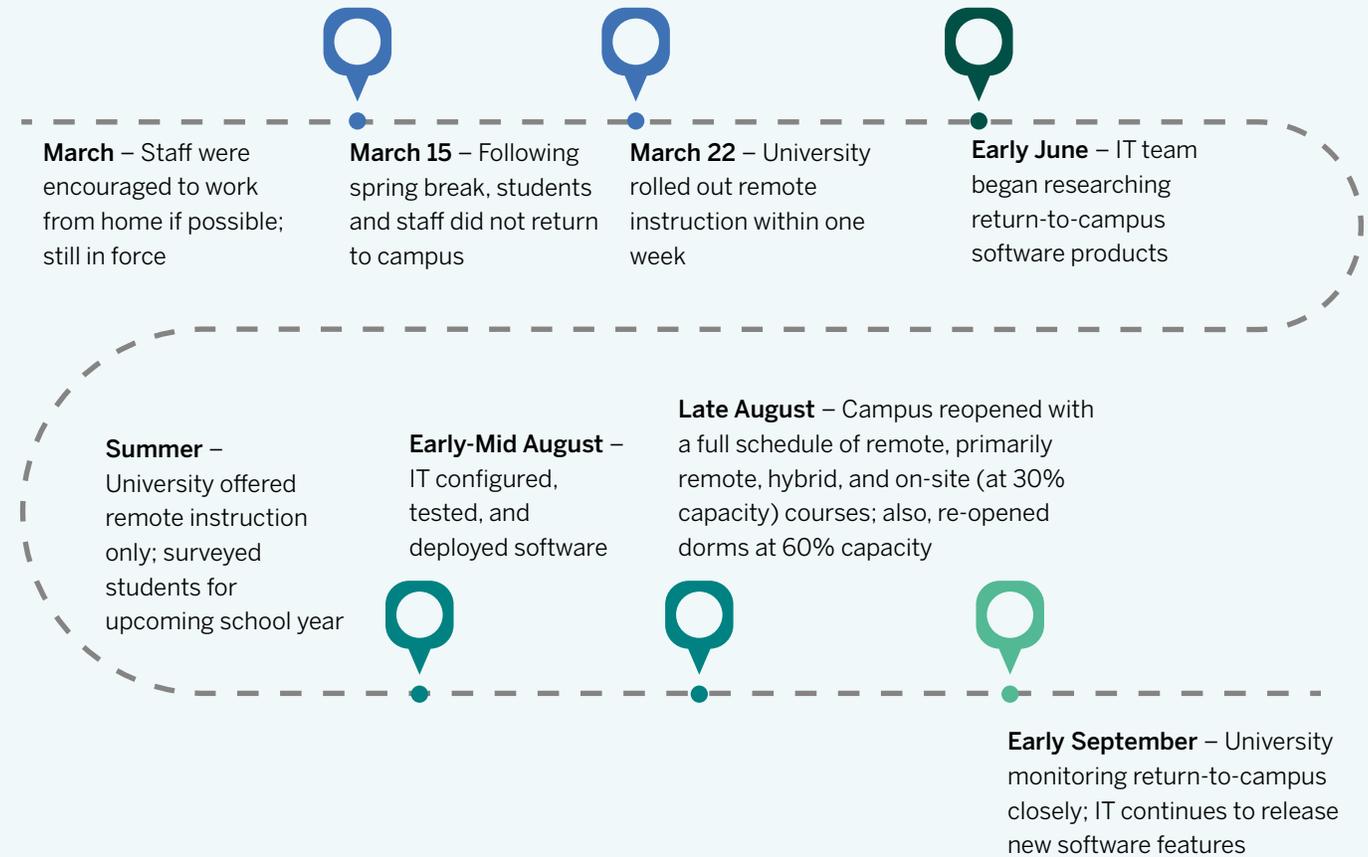
Meeting the Higher-Ed Challenge: Managing Learning While Reducing Risk

When the threat from COVID-19 became clear in early March, administrators at the University of South Florida (USF) – like at many higher-education institutions – closed the campus and kept students home immediately following spring break. They did not want to risk the health of the 55,000+ students in three locations (Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota-Manatee), plus 15,000+ faculty and staff. Within one week, the university rolled out remote instruction for spring semester and requested that all staff who could work from home stay offsite until further notice. The guidance for staff to remain offsite if possible is still in effect today.

To serve the student body, the school continued offering only remote instruction throughout the summer, and student residences remained closed. Over spring and summer, the Dean of Public Health and senior medical experts from the medical school, along with IT, started working on

Figure 1

A Return-to-Campus Timeline of Key Decisions and Actions



a comprehensive plan to track student health and readiness for fall semester.¹ After surveying the student population over the summer to determine which students wanted to return to campus and which preferred to remain off-campus, USF began readying plans to reopen the campus for the fall. Administrators built flexibility into the approach, allowing students to select courses from four teaching methods:

- Fully remote – No in-person requirements
- Primarily remote – Minimal in-person activity, which may include exams, projects, presentations, or site visits
- Hybrid/flexible – A blend of remote instruction and in-person meetings on specified days and times

- In-person – Classes meeting on campus on specified days and times

On campuses, the dorms are at 60% capacity to meet residential demand while also maintaining social distancing and reserving space for students in quarantine. Classrooms are limited to 30% occupancy to follow physical distancing guidelines, and the school has been able to meet student demand for in-person learning so far. The university began its fall 2020 semester in late August, offering a full class schedule. The school has experienced increased enrollment over last year, but with most students opting for remote learning and off-campus residency. (See Figure 1 for a timeline.)

University executives are cautious and not yet ready to declare victory, because the COVID situation on campus (and elsewhere) could change quickly without warning. According to CIO Sidney Fernandes, “it’s too soon to tell how this reopening will go; we’ve done our best.”

One significant part of doing their best was USF’s implementation of CampusPass from Appian to track student health, as well as faculty and staff health, by asking questions about symptoms and providing guidance about testing, quarantining, and additional medical attention. The software also helps the school to spot and track outbreaks.

Return-to-Campus Software Provides Essential Student Health Data

The university’s decision on software had to be fast-tracked because of the short timeframe, and its process is an instructive example of IT executive decision-making. Once the university medical experts handed the technology selection to IT in late spring, the CIO and the Senior Director, Digital Innovation and Transformation knew that software would be needed to monitor student health and take appropriate student safety actions. They quickly compiled a list of 10 software products that were designed for tracking higher-ed return-to-campus data. After initial research, they saw that products fell into two distinctly different camps:

→ software that focused on contact tracing in addition to student health status

→ software that surveyed, monitored, and tracked student health, without including contact tracing

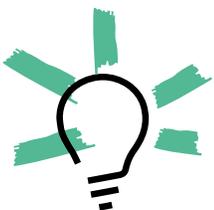
This was an important delineation because 1) software with contact-tracing capabilities was significantly more expensive than products for surveying and collecting student health status, and 2) the only entity legally empowered to conduct contact tracing in the state of Florida is the state itself. This insight allowed the team to focus on five products from the second category best suited for the university’s needs.

The IT team decided within a couple of weeks to proceed with Appian. Their decisioning process included these considerations:

→ **Appian relationship:** The university has been an Appian customer for five years. In fact, Appian based its new workforce and student readiness software on a case management application that the school bought 2 ½ years ago.

→ **Speed:** The IT staff could have built an in-house application, but there was not enough time to build and deploy a workable custom solution for the fall semester. Deploying a SaaS solution was the fastest path to readiness.

→ **Flexibility:** Within one month, IT customized the software and released it. They quickly moved from beta to full release, and they are still releasing new features as of early September. (Although this is a packaged product, it is possible to customize the software in-house.)



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→ **Purpose-built:** CampusPass is specifically designed for return-to-campus safety. The software asks students questions about possible COVID symptoms and exposure, tracks test results, and then branches into other health questions. Proactive reporting provides administrators with insight into where their cases are.² The software also generates a facility pass allowing qualified students access to campus. If a “no” signal is triggered, meaning a student is not allowed on campus, Student Health Services follows up with the student.

→ **Product features:** The Appian software provides many features, including strong workflow capabilities; software designed for student use; a low-code framework that speeds building applications; configurable and customizable software; and a powerful development platform. There's also the capability to integrate CampusPass with third-party software and with text messaging for the student body.

Call to Action

Trying to manage the health and safety of thousands of students using spreadsheets, Word documents, and email is nonsensical. On the other hand, building a technology solution in-house under impossibly short timeframes is equally foolhardy because it simply takes too long to address today's immediate problems head-on. School administrators of any sizeable student body must seize the challenge of quickly implementing return-to-campus software (whether it is mainly managing student data or also managing contact tracing). Failure to do so puts the school, students, and staff at risk, and could cause undue interruptions to the school year.

The University of South Florida is an excellent example of top medical advisors and IT leaders moving quickly to meet the safety and learning needs of the student population, and this case study provides valuable insights for other higher-ed organizations seeking similar solutions.

Endnotes

1 The University of South Florida has a medical school, nursing school, school of pharmacy, and school of public health, as well as research institutions that work closely with the State of Florida. The school's medical expertise encompasses top epidemiologists and virologists.

2 The school is using randomized testing to fact-check whether on-campus students are using the self-reporting software.

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About the Author

Connie Moore is Vice President and Principal Analyst at Deep Analysis. She joined the firm after four years as Senior Vice President, Research, at Digital Clarity Group, and more than twenty years as Research Director and Vice President at Forrester Research. Connie is a widely acclaimed speaker, advisor, consultant, and expert in digital process automation, customer experience management, digital experience platforms, and content services. In 2014 Connie received the Workflow Management Coalition's globally recognized Marvin Manheim Award for influence, contribution, and distinction based on standout contributions to the field of workflow and business process management.