

COVID-19

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING TEAMS

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has provided [guidance](#) to U.S. institutions of higher education, and various agencies of the federal government as well as state and local health departments are updating their guidance almost daily.

But if you are a U.S. college or university, do you have an adequate plan – and the necessary supporting materials – to communicate about the coronavirus to your students, their families, your faculty, and your staff? Do you have a plan for how you will deal with public and media interest if you have an outbreak of infection on your campus or in your health facility?

Legend Labs has worked with a large, flagship state university to develop its coronavirus communications plan, and developed it well before the virus was even reported in the United States. As we've developed these strategies, we've identified some key considerations your institution may find of value, including the following:

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

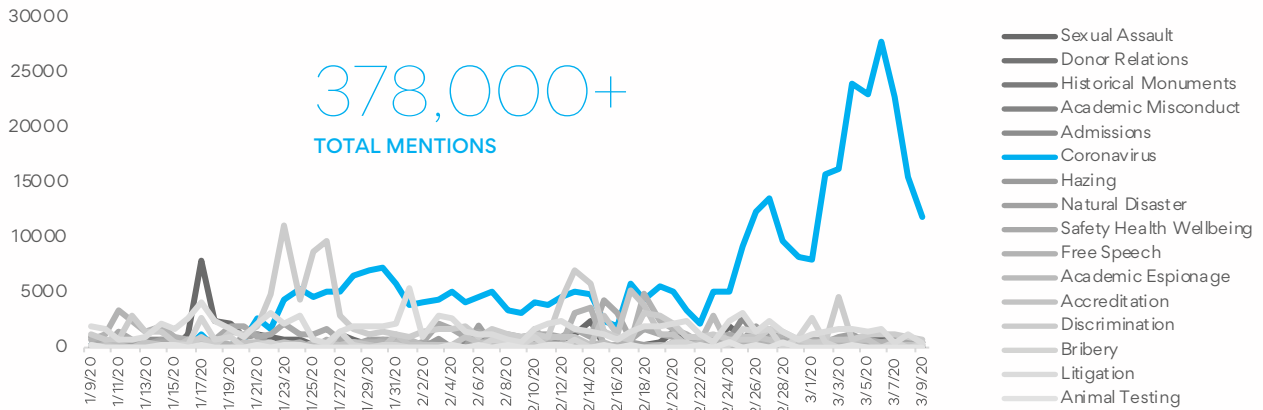
- The situation is changing daily. There must be a mechanism for near-constant review and updating of policies, strategies, and supporting materials.
- Educational institutions generally lack public health expertise and will necessarily defer to local public health agencies for guidance. But they cannot defer to overburdened public health agencies for communications. It is essential that the institutions take the initiative in communicating with all their various constituencies, some of whom, especially parents and other members of students' families, may be outside the local jurisdiction, outside the state, and even outside the country.
- Institutions with study-abroad programs have already begun to bring students home and curtail programs. In addition to dealing with health and quarantining concerns, they must deal with travel logistics and requests from students and parents for refunds of tuition and fees associated with those programs.
- It is essential for the institution to develop a central hub of information, and a coordinated group of individuals responsible for maintaining it.
- Anxiety – whether justified or excessive – is a real concern as people must cope with the uncertainties of this epidemic, including such questions as fatality rates, virulence, availability of testing, and so on. Mental health care and counseling is an essential component of the institutional response, as this coronavirus [guidance from Johns Hopkins University](#) demonstrates.
- Institutions that also operate health care facilities such as hospitals will find themselves dealing with media inquiries and possibly with coronavirus cases even if the virus does not otherwise appear to be present in the campus population itself. Public perceptions may fail to distinguish between the two unless care is taken in communications.
- Fear and stigma associated with infection is a concern, especially if it is associated with a particular national or ethnic group. Institutions should take the opportunity to re-state their values and take steps to prevent a backlash against the members of any such group.

DIGITAL LISTENING TO INFORM STRATEGY

The Legend Labs team includes experts in digital analytics who leverage state-of-the-art software to extract insights and intelligence from online conversations. We are tracking the COVID-19 conversation as it relates to all universities in the United States to better understand communications imperatives and best practices.

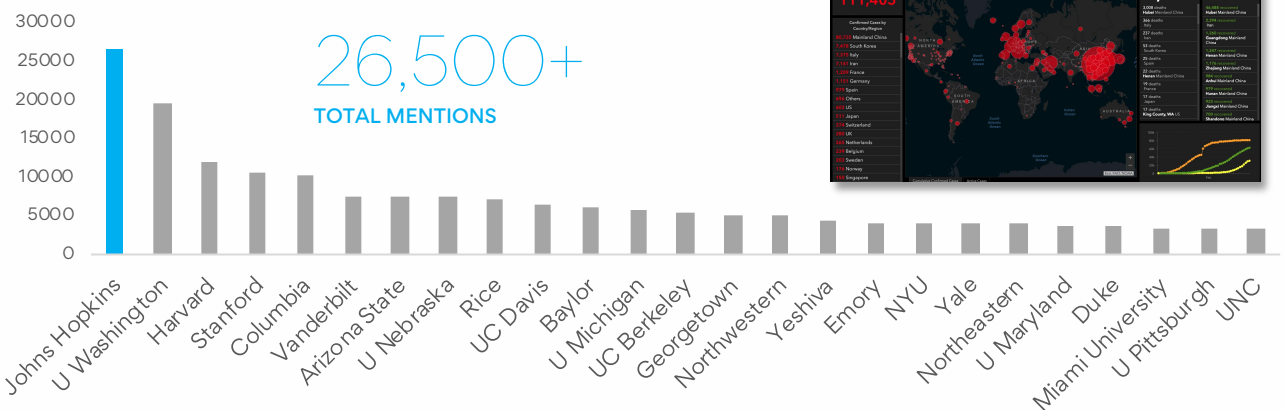
1. Conversation about COVID-19 has driven considerably more volume than all other benchmarked university vulnerabilities.

Conversation Volume Over Time By Top University Vulnerabilities (Last 60 Days)



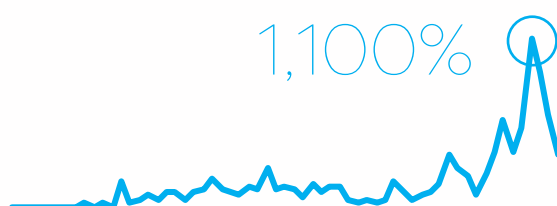
2. Johns Hopkins University is referenced most often in a university comparison due to widely-referenced COVID-19 Interactive Map (source).

Conversation Volume By University (TOP 25 By Volume)



3. KEY TREND: Conversations referencing classes moving online or being taught virtually spiked considerably in the last three days.

Conversation Volume Over Time (Mentions of remote, virtual or online classes)



Recent Example:

