

Harvard's New Era Likely Means Smaller Classes, Deeper Cleaning

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by Janet Lorin

Harvard University is weighing an array of options -- from disinfecting classrooms after each session to reducing the number of students sitting in lecture halls -- to cope with the coronavirus pandemic when it reopens, said President Lawrence Bacow.

The school will also likely cancel some fall sports, he said, and is holding off a decision to resume instruction on campus as long as possible.

"Lots of things will be different when students come back," Bacow said Tuesday in an interview on Bloomberg Television with David Rubenstein. "The availability of classrooms will be a challenge."

The Cambridge, Massachusetts, school hasn't been immune to the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Last month, Harvard forecast an almost \$1.2 billion deficit over the fiscal year that ends June 30 and the one that begins July 1.

The decision about bringing students back to campus isn't just about the kind of instruction they will receive. Among the issues is preparing the campus so that it can isolate students who may be hit with the virus.

Here are other key takeaways from Bacow's interview with Rubenstein, who is a member of the Harvard Corp., the university's governing board.

- "The online experience worked better than I think most of us expected," Bacow said. "Far from perfect."
- "We have not made a decision yet whether or not to bring students back or how many to bring back," Bacow said. "We're trying to delay that as much as possible."
- Students would have to enter and exit the classroom carefully so they don't bunch up. You have to disinfect the classroom probably after each use.
- There are some schools that are likely to allow students to go part-time and we will prorate tuition as a result.
- Harvard is in the process of reopening research operations.
- Bacow, 68, said getting the coronavirus "took a lot out of me." He announced in March that he and his wife had the virus, and they later recovered.

The Ivy League school has declined to accept federal stimulus money available to it after a barrage of criticism, including from U.S. President Donald Trump. Harvard was eligible to receive about \$8.7 million based on a federal formula. Several of its wealthy peers also announced they wouldn't take the money, including Stanford, Princeton and Yale universities.

Harvard said in March that it is well positioned to withstand a recession and the interruption of its operations, largely because of long-term planning by endowment chief N.P. "Narv" Narvekar. The endowment lost 27% of its value in the last downturn. Its endowment was valued at \$40.9 billion as of June 2019, the most recent publicly available figure.

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