High School in the Pandemic: Consequences over four years and tools for mitigation

January 27, 2020

We know that each incoming NU class from fall 2020 until fall 2024 will have experienced some part of high school during the pandemic. (We don’t know whether any further classes might be affected.) For domestic U.S. students this means that some amount of their instruction definitely took place online; some amount might have taken place at least partly in person at their schools; and some amount might have been disrupted by changing modalities week-to-week during some semesters. It means the same exact thing for international students, added to which there may continue to be challenges related to international travel and visas, Homeland Security requirements for study in the U.S., etc.

We need to prepare for students affected by the pandemic for the next four years (at least). At the same time, we must understand how high school seniors, juniors, sophomores, and first-year students experienced very different impacts on their high school coursework, and adjust our preparation and planning accordingly for the next few years. Here is a simple snapshot of the classes of 2024-2028:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>COVID semesters</th>
<th>high school years</th>
<th>Test Opt Admit</th>
<th>SAT Subject Scores **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>Spring 2020</td>
<td>Senior year</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>Spring 2020; Fall 2020; Spring 2021</td>
<td>Junior and senior years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2026</td>
<td>Spring 2020; Fall 2020; Spring 2021</td>
<td>Sophomore and junior years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2027</td>
<td>Spring 2020; Fall 2020; Spring 2021</td>
<td>first year and sophomore years</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2028</td>
<td>Fall 2020; Spring 2021</td>
<td>first-year</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this document we begin to articulate issues in three categories: high school responses to the pandemic that might have consequences for student persistence and success; the possible negative effects of this impact on student readiness for Northwestern; strategies at Northwestern to mitigate these negative effects.

THE PANDEMIC AND IMPACTS ON HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING

For all students:

- Generally, for nearly all students, one-and-and-a-half years of disruption.
- IN many schools, even in highly ranked, well-resourced high schools, students were essentially going to school part-time.
- This meant that in many high schools, dramatically less material was covered.
- The phenomenon of freezing grades made it very difficult to give failing grades.
- In schools that went back and forth between remote and in-person/ hybrid, students experienced inevitable disruption.
For some students a greater cost to their education—four factors:

- Material circumstances of home life, including privacy to concentrate, robust connectivity, etc.
- Under resourced high schools had fewer resources to mitigate these material circumstances.
- Students of color have had significant personal experience of illness and death due to COVID.
- Low income students are disproportionately more likely to have family members who are essential workers and therefore more vulnerable to COVID.

IMPACT ON STARTING AT NORTHWESTERN

Given these conditions for the last year and a half, what must we do to ensure our students’ capacity to get work done well and on time given the quarter system and the typical Northwestern class’s workload. Here are some challenges:

- Class of 2024 began Northwestern remotely for fall quarter. While many are on campus this winter quarter, the residential experience is vastly different and most courses including labs and all language courses are remote.

- If classes are in person in fall 2021, some if not many members of the Class of 2025 may be entering their first classroom in 1 ½ years, and they will be Northwestern classrooms on the quarter system.

- Students won’t have visited campus since mid-March 2020. Students will know less about the campus before coming.

- NU went test optional. Students may be admitted who never would have applied before. (Pluses and minuses in general, but worrisome for preparation.)

- Applications have increased by 20%. Incoming 2025 class will have had one of the most competitive admission experiences in memory; many students will have applied to @ 15 schools.

- Finally, pre-existing challenges to persistence and success are only exacerbated because of the conditions of the pandemic.

WEINBERG COLLEGE MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Crucial mitigation tools:
- Arch Scholars
- Summer Activities to boost readiness for all students
- Placement tests
- First and second year Curricula
- Inclusive Teaching strategies
- Advising
- Office of Academic Support and Learning Advancement (ASLA)
- Student Affairs Student Support Services
Central Student Facing Administrative Services
Summer School

1. Arch Scholars – double capacity (separate proposal)

    Pre-matriculation Summer onboarding ever more important

2. pre-fall activities for all students

    Departmental suggestions: activities for incoming students for capacity building: readings, information, etc.

3. Placement Exams

    Placement exams ever more important. We will see a different array of placements than usual.

    Doing placement as early as possible helps schedule classes appropriately. E.g. extra section of an intro language, etc.

4. Curriculum

    Languages
    Calculus
    Chemistry
    College Seminars
    Writing Seminars

5. Inclusive Teaching

    The College’s initiative on Inclusive Teaching dovetails with curriculum development: see Weinberg College Inclusive Teaching Working Group and Eight Principles for Inclusive Teaching

6. Weinberg College Advising

    College Seminar syllabus and College Seminar linked advising
    Weinberg College Advising
    Major advising

7. Office of Academic Support and Learning Advancement

    Office of Academic Support and Learning Advancement is a primary academic partner with Weinberg College and the other undergraduate schools; it needs resources to meet increased demand

8. Partnerships with Student Affairs Units are even more important than usual, especially:

    Student Assistance and Support Services (SASS)
    Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
    Accessible NU (ANU)
9. Partnerships strengthened with administrative student services, esp.:

Student Financial Services
Student Financial Aid

Weinberg Campaign—trajectory for success: Arch Scholars --first year curriculum supported by Advising, ASLA

10. Summer School

Summer School – a tool for a academic advisers to help students if they need to plan out some quarters with fewer than four courses.

Two key issues: new financial aid policy allows students to plan over three summers to spread out course work.

Recommend to Summer school that there be robust online offerings in summer so location is not an obstacle.

*Example of a fairly typical general plan for a student planning to take AP science of some sort in junior and senior years would be HS biology in 9th grade, HS chemistry in 10th grade, and HS physics in 11th grade. (from Laura Panko—her local high school curriculum.)

** Literally as we prepared this document the College Board announced that it was discontinuing the SAT Subject Scores and the SAT Essay.

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For future discussion: current first-year, sophomore and junior Northwestern students and the effect of the pandemic on their college experience: study abroad, lab research, Chicago Field Studies, Summer School, transcript and grade issues (Pass/No Pass; Cr/NC), academic integrity issues in remote examination settings, etc.