



HIGHER EDUCATION AND COVID

by David Vinson, PhD

Responding to the Pandemic in Administrative Spaces

It has been a long and arduous year for so many of us, not least of all because the COVID-19 pandemic has infiltrated our daily lives. So pervasive is the virus that it has ushered in a new vocabulary to the general populace. Just the other day, my daughter used the phrase “social distancing.” She also knows the word “quarantine”, although due to the fact that she is only four years old, she cannot quite string the consonants together. Her evolving vocabulary is a reminder that great social change brings about great linguistic change, and not even our children are exempt from this.

The United States has now surpassed 200,000 coronavirus-related deaths, a staggering number, a number that defies comprehension, especially in consideration that a single death resonates in ways those of us not directly impacted can only begin to imagine. As exhausted and frustrated as we may be, the reality is that we likely have a long way to go. Dr. Anthony Fauci and other top immunologists believe we may need to vaccinate, social distance, continue hand hygiene, and use masks at least until the end of 2021.

For higher education, the work of adapting to the pandemic is hardly over. Of course, we have already implemented a long list of preventative measures: updating our campus pandemic plans; providing response-ready care for the physical and psychological needs of our students, faculty, and staff; adapting campus housing and dining; enforcing social distancing protocols; revising our cleaning strategies; normalizing smart classrooms; redesigning our pedagogy for remote learning; installing touchless technologies; offering virtual commencements; using apps for contact tracing. As diligent and thorough as we have been—and this has required patience, teamwork, innovation, and sacrifice on a tremendous scale—we are nonetheless obligated to revisit even our best practices as we continue to learn from one another.

Of specific interest here is the manner by which institutions are responding to the pandemic in administrative spaces, especially those where students in highly trafficked offices interact with administrative staff. The pandemic has radically altered how campuses operate; and like our classrooms, residence halls, recreation and wellness centers, and so on, our administrative spaces require safety measures that mitigate the spread of COVID-19. To manage this while still operating with efficiency is hardly straightforward.

Curbing the Spread of Infection with Visitation Policies at New York University

The visitor policy at New York University (NYU) is one from which other private universities and colleges can learn, for it discourages non-essential visitors from campus; it works to protect a campus community from contagion despite its location in a densely populated city; and that it is a multi-step process equipped with many checks and balances means the opportunity for human error is greatly reduced. Because the policy in place is campus-wide, it serves administrative areas, as well.

The visitor policy at NYU—and this applies, among others, to a guest lecturer of an in-person course, a research specialist, an administrative subject matter expert, a technician, and vendors—is such that visitors must complete the NYU Returns Visitor Request Form at least 10 business days prior to the day of the campus visit. NYU defines a visitor as “anyone that does not normally work or study in any specific university building.” Approved visitors must complete the Daily COVID-19 Screener for Visitor and Vendor Access and show the green approval screen to the Public Safety Officer for building entry. Further,

visitors must print out their approval email and confirmation from the Visitor Form or be able to show the email to a Public Safety Officer or Building Representative. At check-in to the desired building, Public Safety will review the approval email, checking the name against the guest’s government-issued ID, and ensure the visitor is compliant with the Daily COVID-19 Screener. Upon entry, all visitors are required to wear masks and to maintain social distancing protocols.

Personal Protective Equipment and Protective Barriers in Administrative Spaces

In terms of preventing the spread of COVID-19, both administrative employees and students adopt many of the same strategies. They wear masks and maintain social distancing protocols; some may wear gloves, opt for eye protection of some kind, and each would be wise to wear closed-toe shoes. Such equipment is commonly referred to as “personal protective equipment,” known otherwise by the acronym PPE.

The biggest difference between both groups is time, or rather, time spent in a single space. Depending on the job, an administrator on campus may remain inside the same building or

room all day, for 8 to 10 hours, leaving perhaps only for lunch; students, however, are likely to be far more mobile during the day as they go from building to building for their classes and other on-campus needs. All students, faculty, and staff should be utilizing PPE, but even these safety measures may not provide enough protection in highly trafficked administrative spaces, especially for those employees who remain largely in place all day. Essential on-campus services such as Admissions, Academic Advising, Financial Aid and Scholarships, the Office of Accessibility, the Career Center, IT offices, among many others, all welcome students throughout the day. It is within such spaces that the likelihood of infection rises.

To counteract any increased risk, administrative spaces are installing plexiglass and other types of clear plastic barriers. Plexiglass (acrylic sheet) is a common name for poly (methyl methacrylate) or PMMA, and it is a transparent thermoplastic often used as an alternative to glass. Most often PMMA serves as a barrier at front-facing reception desks, or at counters where items are sold or exchanged. It is also prevalent in office spaces where undivided cubicles and workstations are located. Plexiglass barriers are beneficial in a number of ways—they can block respiratory droplets produced by

NIGHTLOCK® LOCKDOWN

SECURE CLASSROOM IN SECONDS



SIMPLE · FAST · SECURE FOR EXTREME EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

The Nightlock Lockdown Door Barricade allows a teacher to immediately lock the door from inside the classroom, eliminating exposure during a hostile intruder situation. This device makes it virtually impossible for an intruder to break through an entry door.

- Simply add this safety device to classroom doors
- Works with outward and inward swing doors
- No need to replace existing hardware
- One time solution - easy to install
- Lockdown in seconds

So affordable!
\$59.95
ea.



NIGHTLOCK
classroomlockdown.com
CALL TOLL FREE 1-855-644-4856

a person in close contact with the barrier; they are nonporous and may be disinfected; they can function as a physical separation to support social and physical distancing efforts; in the workplace specifically, they cause minimal disruption to work and business practices; they can also provide a sense of safety for workers, customers, and visitors.

It is crucial to note, however, that plexiglass barriers do not provide a zero-risk solution. For instance, they do not address all possible modes of transmission, such as aerosol transmission, nor do they fully protect anyone from COVID-19. Further, such a barrier does not replace the need for social distancing or hygiene practices (e.g., washing hands, not touching your face, wearing face coverings). There is also the issue of space, as barriers may not be feasible or appropriate in all workspaces or for all work activities. They may also break if individuals lean against them and in turn expose sharp edges.

Materials made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) can be used as barriers to separate people and spaces. Like plexiglass, they are designed to help protect from the transfer of airborne droplets, and they are especially useful in spaces where plexiglass may disrupt a workspace. They are available, for

instance, in a variety of designs ranging from desk-mounted, ceiling hanging, counter dividers, and floor standing. They can also be designed in different sizes, as clear or opaque, and with anti-microbial surfaces.

Other Creative Solutions

Shifting administrative employees from dedicated desks to spaced out flexible desks may be one way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Many campuses across the country are following occupancy requirements; as such, not everyone is present in office on the same day. This means more space can become general purpose, and that employees present on the day can work at some physical distance.

Highly trafficked offices can remove lobby furniture or even convert them into health check-in stations where employees and visitors are screened. Another strategy is to implement capacity signage in every room, not merely the lobby but also conference rooms, elevators, and bathrooms. The effect is to control how many people are in any given space. Providing stations where occupants can access hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes is another simple means of slowing the spread of the virus.

Maintaining Our Standards for the Greater Good

Being part of any on-campus community means that we must continue to be respectful and supportive of the needs of others. That we are still learning about COVID-19, and that one can spread the virus even without experiencing symptoms, means that our diligence is a moral imperative. As a community, we must protect one another. With an alignment of policies and practices on campus, we can continue to develop a culture of prevention and safety that, eventually, will bring forth something resembling our lives before the pandemic.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: PUPN staff writer

Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

SUPERIOR LOCKERS

AMERICA'S MOST COMPLETE LOCKER LINE

METAL • PLASTIC • WOOD • PHENOLIC

MADE IN AMERICA SINCE 1936



+MEDSAFE

ANTIMICROBIAL FINISHES

Our Metal Lockers are available with MedSafe™ antimicrobial finishes with Microban®, formulated to protect against bacteria, mold, yeast & mildew for up to 26 years! Very beneficial for educational, healthcare, food processing and other hygiene conscious environments.

WE ARE GREENGUARD GOLD CERTIFIED



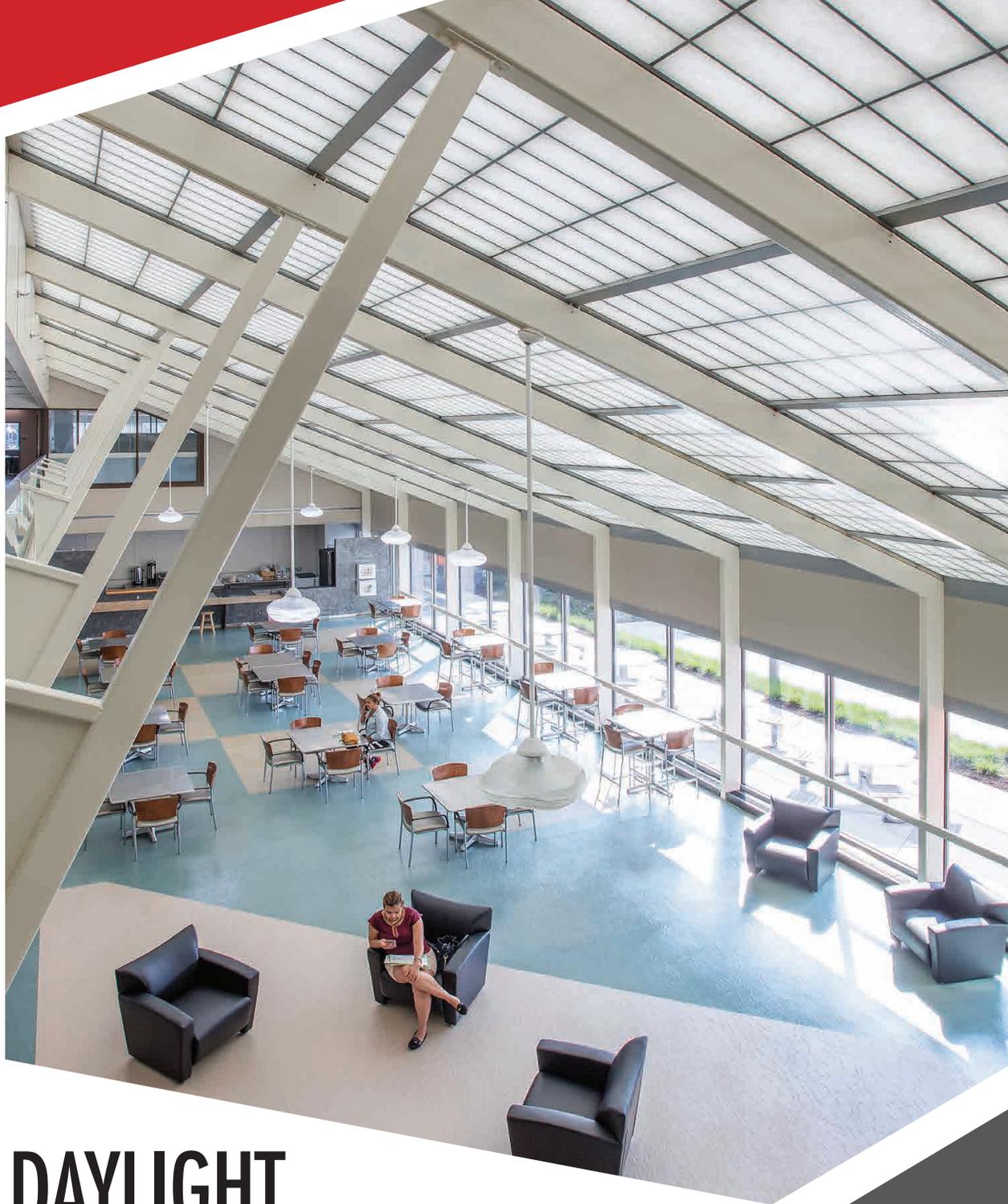
CONTACT US FOR ALL YOUR LOCKER ROOM NEEDS

800-776-1342

✉ info@ListIndustries.com 🌐 ListIndustries.com







ADD DAYLIGHT & **CONTROL GLARE**

WITH TRANSLUCENT PANEL DAYLIGHTING SYSTEMS

Lightweight / Easy-to-install / Light Diffusing / Insulation Options / Adapter
Panels for Existing Framing / Pre-assembled Options / Custom Finish Colors



SKYLIGHTS/CANOPIES/WALL SYSTEMS
MAJORSKYLIGHTS.COM

888-759-2678

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE CAN SHINE.™

ACCESS TO NATURAL LIGHT
BENEFITS STUDENTS, STAFF
AND THE BOTTOM LINE!