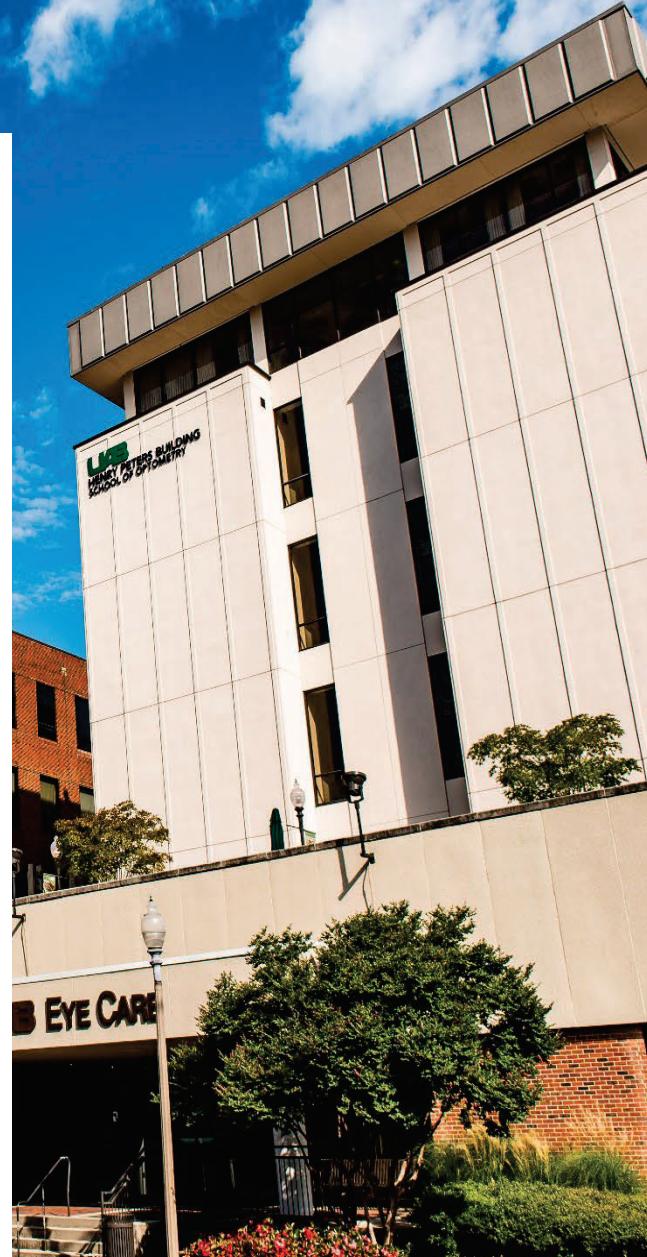


# Business Continuity Plan

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The UAB School of Optometry's Response  
to a suspension of operations due to a  
pandemic, natural disaster, or other  
widespread disruptive event.



OCTOBER 17, 2023 (v2)

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The University of Alabama at Birmingham

# **UAB School of Optometry**

## **Business Continuity Plan**

Pandemics, natural disasters, and terrorist events do occur. And when they do occur, both the University's and the School's operations will be impacted in significant ways. As a prudent step, our Administration seeks to provide guidance that will allow our School to operate in a manner that is as close to normal while maintaining the safety and wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff. The following information will provide guidance to our School should UAB suspend on-campus operations.

### **Leadership Team**

Dr. Kelly Nichols; Dean

Chris Boutwell; Executive Director of Administrative Operations

Dr. Adam Gordon; Chair, Dept. of Optometry and Vision Science

Dr. Kristine Hopkins; Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Dr. Timothy Kraft; Associate Dean for Research

Satina Richardson; Director, UABSO Communications

Dr. Gerald Simon; Associate Dean for Student Affairs

Dr. Elizabeth Steele: Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs

### **TRANSITION AWAY FROM NORMAL OPERATIONS:**

### **Communications**

The Leadership Team will meet daily to weekly as urgency dictates, until normal operations resume, via Zoom or an equivalent virtual communication platform, to discuss known issues within each programmatic area of the School. During these meetings, action plans will be developed to address issues as they arise. Support staff will be used to help address these issues.

The School (and UAB via B-Alert) will communicate with students, faculty, and staff on a routine basis to ensure they are updated on the most current University and School of Optometry protocols and procedures. These communications will be conveyed via a variety of means that may include virtual staff meetings, virtual faculty meetings, SOO Web updates, e-mails, and social media updates. When working remotely, faculty and “essential” staff will forward UAB phone numbers to their personal cell phone or home phone to remain accessible.

## **Administration**

The SOO has categorized its staff into two distinct groups in order to operate the School at a minimal level. Criteria is established to categorize staff as “essential” or “non-essential.” This categorization is not a judgement of the individual staff member’s overall importance to the School but rather a judgement as to whether the staff member’s function is essential to the School while the School is operated at a minimal level.

Those staff categorized as “essential” are asked to maintain a method of virtual communication at home via home computer, smartphone, etc. A survey should be conducted to ascertain whether staff have the minimal IT resources at home needed to support a virtual communication platform and work remotely. Staff working remotely or in a hybrid model will be provided with IT resources by UABSO to do so in an effective manner.

## **Academic Affairs**

### **Didactic Courses**

Course directors will be required to provide digital access to course instruction either through live, synchronous, virtual communication platform meetings, recorded lectures, and/or by posting previously recorded lectures housed in the current Learning Management System.

- Live, synchronous digital meetings—if the course director chooses to conduct class using a live digital meeting platform, the instructor is

expected to conduct the class at the same day and time that it would have been provided if the class was in person. This will ensure that instructors do not schedule classes at overlapping times. This platform should allow for classroom discussion between faculty and students.

- Recorded lectures—if the course director chooses to record his/her lectures, they must be posted on the current Learning Management System for easy student access. The instructor must also provide a mechanism for on-line course discussion. This may be done through a live, digital meeting session during the normally scheduled class time or through a digital on-line discussion board (via the current Learning Management System). The course director may communicate directly with individual students through email, however there is benefit from open discussion and this is strongly encouraged.
- Posting previously recorded lectures—the course director may post previously recorded versions of the course material. Similar to posting recorded lectures, the course director should provide a means for interactive class discussion.

Course director communication to students and administration: Course directors must provide information to students and administrators regarding the method for classroom instruction that will be applied.

- Course directors must provide students with instructions for accessing lectures and discussion boards. This communication should come from the course director through the current Learning Management System or campus email.
- Course directors must provide administrators with information on how the course will be delivered and how to access the course materials in the event that a student has questions or concerns. This will also allow administrators the opportunity to oversee class schedules to avoid class conflicts. Course directors should provide information regarding digital didactic instruction to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Training: Faculty needing assistance in managing digital course delivery may obtain instruction through the UAB campus eLearning website.

Surveys will be conducted to ascertain whether faculty have the minimal IT resources at home to support digital course delivery. Faculty that do not have the needed resources will be provided with such by UABSO.

### **Lab Courses**

Those portions of labs that can be taught through a virtual classroom will be taught digitally using the guidelines outlined above. The portions of lab that do not fit into the virtual classroom will be postponed until in-person classroom instruction can resume.

### **Clinical Affairs**

In the event that didactic courses and other non-clinical face-to-face meetings at UAB are curtailed, the UAB Eye Care clinic will remain fully operational with precautions in place.

In the event that all non-essential operations shut down, all UAB Eye Care clinic operations would be suspended. Patients will be notified through 4PatientCare (online platform) that appointments are canceled and will be rescheduled at a near future time to be determined. Ocular urgencies and emergencies will be handled with the on-call providers, including a team of residents and faculty experts. Telemedicine services will be utilized to triage patient needs. Referrals will be made as deemed appropriate. The clinic voice mail message will alert patients of our operational changes and direct them accordingly. Patients who need prescriptions refilled or other assistance will be forwarded by phone to the designated staff member. Designated staff will continue responding to electronic communications. Clinic Administration and designated staff will meet regularly via Zoom or equivalent virtual communication platform, and/or phone. Before returning to a fully operational clinical, the facility will be thoroughly inspected for safety, cleaned and disinfected.

## **Student Affairs**

Students who need support may contact members of the Student Affairs support team via office extension or email. Zoom or an equivalent virtual communication platform will be used whenever "face-to-face" counseling is needed.

Applications for coming academic years will be reviewed by committee members electronically. Competitive applicants will be interviewed virtually, and subsequent Admissions Committee meetings will also be conducted virtually.

Day-to-day operations will be handled via Zoom or an equivalent virtual communication platform, phone, and email. Convocation and other graduation related activities will be rescheduled if needed.

Tutoring sessions could be managed virtually if needed. Tutors will be allowed to set-up a student account on Zoom or on a virtual communication platform.

Students who become sick or who need general support should contact the SOO Department of Student Affairs at 205-975-0739. Prior to returning to class, any student who becomes sick will have to provide documentation from their health care provider indicating that the student has been cleared to return to class. The SOO Department of Student Affairs will notify the Infection Control Officer and the Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs whenever a student is found to have a contagious disease. A virtual platform will be used whenever "face-to-face" counseling is needed.

## **Research**

Research within the School of Optometry is strongly guided by the office of the Vice President for Research at UAB. That office provides operational guidelines for safety and efficacy for basic science and patient-based research to which the faculty and research staff are directed under both normal and extraordinary circumstances. <https://www.uab.edu/research/home/>

Basic Science Research will continue at a minimal level in order to maintain the viability of on-going experiments and prevent catastrophic loss of data.

PI's and support staff will work from home as needed and communicate via phone and/or email.

Active animal colonies will be supported following ARP guidelines supplemented by minimal care visits on a weekly basis performed by the PI or designated lab-staff members. An assessment of currently maintained strains will be made and those not critically needed or easily replaced will be removed. Voluntary experiments planned will be delayed. Time-critical experiments will not be initiated, but those underway will be performed by minimal staff in the most time-efficient manner possible. For a longer-term duration (>3 months), laying off personnel and cryo-preserving strains will need to be considered.

For primate labs, ARP guidelines will be followed regarding animal maintenance and care that is currently performed by ARP staff. Any additional required maintenance and care conducted by lab personnel will continue to be performed by the same personnel on an as-needed basis. Requisite procedures performed by lab personnel in ARP-maintained space will need to continue, with the requirement that procedures will not be performed unless ARP is notified that procedures will be conducted, and that ARP staff have assured that requisite supply items provided by ARP (e.g., medical gases) are available. Voluntary procedures that do not require ARP personnel (e.g., some experiments) will be minimized as much as possible for the duration of a UAB shutdown.

For ongoing human subjects research, we will delay seeing our patients which may require “out of the window” subject visits. When the clinic resumes normal operations, we will see our research patients. Patient safety will not be compromised by delaying their study visits. Study PI's and coordinators will provide patients with appropriate contact information in the event they have a research related question.

## **Pay Practices**

UABSO understands and appreciates the fact that even the smallest change in pay practice can significantly impact the families of our faculty and staff. UABSO also appreciates the fact that we are a part of a large organization that must take into consideration the needs across a wide range of University interests. Any level of diminished operations can quickly have a significant financial impact on the University.

As such, the University will provide the Schools and Colleges across campus with pay practice guidance.

## **TRANSITION BACK INTO NORMAL OPERATIONS:**

### **Clinical Affairs**

The UAB Eye Clinic will follow practices consistent with guidance from the University, with applicable modifications appropriate for optometric practice. Specific guidance documents will be provided as indicated, based on specifics of the emergency, with patient safety as the priority. Pandemic-related emergencies will lead to guidance specific to the infection. Telemedicine and remote clinical education will be implemented as indicated.

### **Academic Affairs**

#### **Didactic and Laboratory Instruction:**

Return to normal operations will require a careful phased approach to protect students, faculty, and staff. As risk level decreases from high risk through moderate and low risk phases, different precautions will be required. Once the risk level returns to normal, the School of Optometry will be allowed to resume normal operations.

In the event of a pandemic, clinical learning will be conducted in person to the extent safe for patients and students. Telemedicine and remote clinical activities

will be utilized as appropriate. Guidance and specifics will be provided specific to the infection.

### **Moderate Risk Level**

#### **Non-Pandemic Related Event**

- Didactic course work will continue in an on-line, remote learning format. Classes will be conducted during scheduled course times and delivered by faculty in either a synchronous or a partially synchronous format. Faculty may post recorded lectures if desired but will continue to meet with students for live interactive learning for a portion of the course.
- Labs will be conducted in an on-line, remote learning format to the extent it is practical and continues to meet the learning objectives of the course.
- Labs that cannot be effectively conducted in a virtual format will continue to be postponed until the lab facilities are deemed safe for student and faculty return.
- Testing for didactic courses will be performed on-line where feasible. Testing that must be done in person will be allowed once a testing location deemed safe for faculty and students has been secured. In the event of a pandemic, in-person testing may be considered if students can be seated to allow for social distancing. Any in-person, in-classroom testing will require all students to wear face masks that cover the nose and mouth at all times.
- Lab tests may be conducted in person once a testing location deemed safe for faculty and students has been secured. In the event of a pandemic, student numbers should be limited to allow for social distancing where feasible. Testing that requires close proximity will require the use of PPE by all participants and student group numbers must be limited. Every effort must be made to limit close contact time between cohorts of students and between students and faculty.

### **Pandemic Related Event:**

- The steps undertaken during a non-pandemic event will also be undertaken during a pandemic where applicable. Additionally, labs that cannot be effectively conducted in a virtual format may be done in person on campus with the following safety precautions in place:
  - Students and faculty must make every effort to maintain proper social distancing. This may require meeting in larger lab/classrooms to allow greater distance between each student and/or smaller student group sizes for each lab session.
  - Students and faculty will be required to wear face coverings that cover both the nose and mouth while in public areas and while working with others.
  - Labs requiring close working distances will necessitate the use of PPE including face masking, gloves, and eye shields where appropriate.
  - Frequent hand washing will be encouraged, and hand sanitizer stations will be available as supplies allow.
  - Every effort should be made to limit contact time. Where feasible, a hybrid approach to labs using both virtual and pre-recorded instruction in conjunction with limited in person lab time should be encouraged.
  - Students considered at high risk may be exempt from in person coursework, however, students must successfully complete required course and lab work to meet the requirements of the professional program.
  - Classroom shared surfaces will be cleaned after each class and common areas will be cleaned daily.

## Low Risk Level

### Non-Pandemic Related Event

- Didactic and laboratory instruction may continue to be in an on-line format (similar to the Moderate risk level designation) however at low risk level, students may return to live classroom instruction if the environment is deemed safe for faculty and students.

### Pandemic Related Event

- The steps undertaken during a non-pandemic event will also be undertaken during a pandemic where applicable. Additionally, students may return to live classroom instruction under the following guidelines.
  - Students working within close proximity must wear masking that covers the nose and mouth.
  - Where possible, classes should be conducted in larger classrooms to allow students to distance themselves from one another.
  - Where feasible, a hybrid of on-line and in person instruction will be encouraged to decrease student and faculty contact time.
  - Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer will be recommended.
  - Classroom and laboratory surfaces will be disinfected after each use.
  - Students will be required to wear face masking in common areas of the building (except while eating).
  - In-person meetings of large groups of students and/or faculty will be discouraged. Remote (Zoom) meetings will be conducted where/when feasible.
- Students considered at high risk may be exempt from in person classroom and laboratory instruction; however, the student must complete required course and lab work before completing the professional program.