

CAMPUS OPERATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC



A deeper dive into mailroom
operations at colleges and
universities in the United States

The public policy response to COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of campus operations. Total and partial shutdowns have continued through the Fall and Winter and will affect campuses at least partway into this Spring, pending the availability — and public acceptance — of a vaccine. And even then, campuses are taking a conservative approach: For example, the largest university system in the nation, the California State University, will not resume in-person instruction until next Fall.

This situation may conjure images of campuses as ghost towns during this crisis. But just as on the virtual side of academic life, those on the physical side of campus operations have not been idle.

Operations Continue, Despite Campus Closures

Throughout the Fall, the vast majority of college and university campuses adopted hybrid and mixed, rather than fully remote, models of instruction — partly remote, partly in-person — or switched between models during the semester, moving from online to in-person, back to online, and so forth. In a recent survey of the Spaces4Learning readership, 83.5 percent of higher education respondents indicated that their campuses used some form of hybrid or mixed instructional delivery model, with a small percentage reporting variations — such as offering students the option of all-online or all-remote instruction. Only 12.6 percent reported that they were fully online throughout the semester.

Students, administrators, faculty and staff continue to work and learn on the physical campus, even amid massive modifications to everyone's daily routines.

Physical campus operations remain essential, but the impact on space, hours and staff has been palpable. Many campuses are laying off staff in operations.

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY METHODS, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION¹



● ALL IN-PERSON	0.97%
● ALL ONLINE	12.62%
● HYBRID: IN-PERSON & ONLINE	83.50%
● OTHER	2.91%

Physical campus operations remain essential, but the impact on space, hours and staff has been palpable. Many campuses are laying off staff in operations. Cal Tech, for example, issued a memo this Fall asking supervisors to “assess their operations and programming needs and to realign their workforce to meet current and expected operations in this pandemic environment. The process regrettably will result in workforce reductions.”

Mailrooms — campus, departmental and residential — are a prime example. On many campuses, mailrooms have been closed to in-person traffic. Several have adopted smart lockers to provide contactless parcel delivery. Others keep mailrooms open for other needs but are otherwise closed to in-person pickup. Many have restricted hours of operation as well.

Yet the work isn't letting up.

Focus on Mailroom Operations

We went deeper into mailrooms with a separate survey among the Spaces4Learning audience, in collaboration with Quadient, also conducted this Fall. About 61 percent of respondents are experiencing a relatively low volume of packages — 100 or fewer packages per day. But 21 percent are receiving 100 to 500 per day. Another 7 percent are seeing 500 to 1,000 packages coming through per day. And a substantial 11 percent are getting more than 1,000 packages coming through per day. (As a side note, those parcels are delivered typically by one to five different carriers. Only about a quarter of our respondents said that more than five carriers delivered packages to their mailroom.)

OVERALL DAILY CAMPUS MAILROOM VOLUME (packages/parcels per day), FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION²



● 50 OR FEWER	33.80%
● BETWEEN 50-100	26.76%
● BETWEEN 100-500	21.13%
● BETWEEN 500-1,000	7.04%
● 1,000 AND MORE	11.27%

“COVID certainly has restricted mail delivery to the buildings across campus. It may be here – but we do not receive it.” – Anonymous Survey Respondent

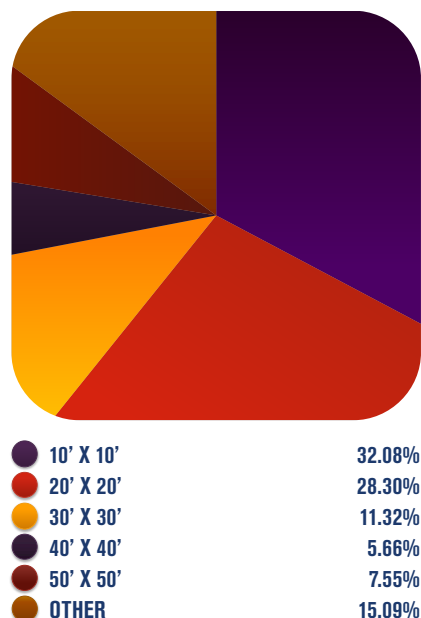
The current pandemic situation, coupled with increased parcel volume, has created some unique challenges and exacerbated some of the usual ones.

One of these challenges relates to building access policies enacted to limit the number of people on campus. According to one respondent to the survey: “COVID certainly has restricted mail delivery to the buildings across campus. It may be here — but we do not receive it.”

Said another: “Our offices are not staffed and kept locked. Only key-holders allowed on campus can access mail. This includes faculty and graduate students.”

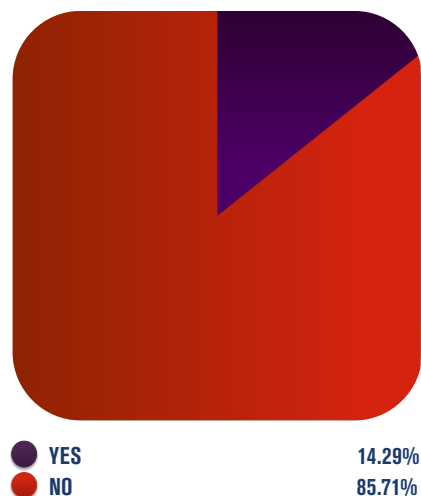
The most commonly cited challenge among respondents is one that’s certainly not unique to the pandemic era: mailroom space and storage space. Nearly 47 percent of respondents cited this as a major concern.

MAILROOM SPACE DEDICATED TO STORAGE, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION³



Surprisingly, space/storage beat out staffing as a concern, although staff shortage was the second-most-cited challenge among our respondents, at 30 percent. Interestingly, although it was a major concern, the majority of respondents said they didn’t anticipate the need for additional staff to address increasing parcel volume.

“DO YOU ANTICIPATE HAVING TO ADD MORE MAILROOM STAFF TO ACCOMMODATE THE GROWING PARCEL VOLUME ON CAMPUS IN THE NEAR FUTURE?” FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION⁴



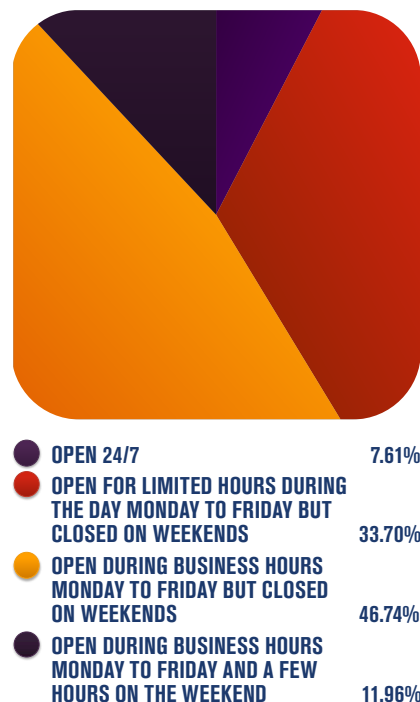
Mailroom hours were also a major concern, cited by 23.33 percent of respondents. It’s difficult to quantify the number of campuses that reduced mailroom hours to address COVID concerns, especially given that individual buildings, departments, schools, colleges and residences within a single campus might have separate mailrooms and different policies regarding mailroom hours.

As an example, Stony Brook University in New York has six

mailrooms across campus for its residences alone. Anecdotally, some, such as Brandeis University in Massachusetts, kept their mailroom hours standard even when students moved off campus. The State University of New York’s College of Environmental Sciences and Forestry kept their mailroom hours the same during their COVID reopening. Loyola University Chicago kept its mailroom open but temporarily set hours for the mailrooms on its various campuses to Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Among our respondents, as of this Fall, less than 8 percent said their mailrooms were open 24/7. A little more than a third had limited hours during the week and were closed on the weekend. The plurality, almost 47 percent, said their mailrooms were open during business hours but closed on the weekends. Another 12 percent said their mailrooms were open during business hours as well as a few hours on the weekend.

MAILROOM HOURS FOR PICKUP, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION⁵



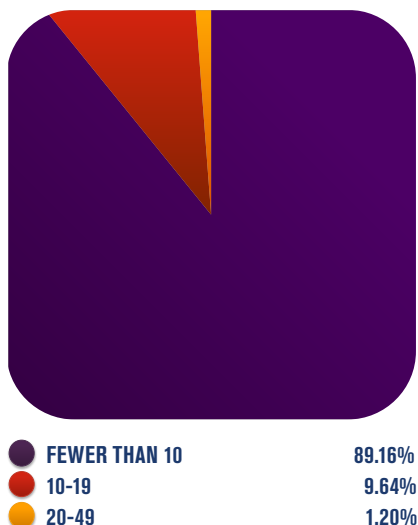
Tracking was a major non-COVID-related concern. Some 23.33 percent of respondents said that accurate tracking was a major concern, and another 20 percent cited internal tracking as a concern.

“Accommodating larger packages” was also up there at 23.33 percent, and several respondents elaborated on the pains of dealing with large packages in an open-ended comments box on the survey. One complained of “large deliveries for departments not in the same building as the mailroom.” Another cited large packages coming into the library mailroom.

COVID-related procedures were surprisingly low on the list of concerns. “Long line-ups for retrieval” were noted by just 6.67 percent of respondents. “Facilitating a safe parcel retrieval collection process” was cited by a more substantial 11.11 percent as a big challenge.

Theft came in last among the concerns cited by survey respondents at just 5.56 percent. The vast majority, almost 90 percent, said they experienced fewer than 10 thefts per year. No respondents indicated they had thefts of 50 or higher.

ANNUAL PARCELS STOLEN, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION⁶



BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR THE MAILROOM, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION⁷



MAILROOM SPACE/STORAGE	46.67%
NOT ENOUGH STAFF	30.00%
LONG LINE-UPS FOR RETRIEVAL	6.67%
ACCURATE TRACKING	23.33%
THEFT/SECURITY	5.56%
FACILITATING A SAFE PARCEL COLLECTION PROCESS	28.30%
MAILROOM HOURS	23.33%
ACCOMMODATING LARGER PACKAGES	5.66%
INTERNAL TRACKING	20.00%
OTHER	16.67%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents were asked to choose all responses that apply.

Solutions Focus:

Smart Lockers, Smart Tracking

We also took a deeper dive into two major solutions for campus mailrooms: smart lockers and parcel tracking software for tracking and managing packages. Smart lockers are one obvious solution for parcel and equipment pick-up during the pandemic, as they allow for contactless handoff of parcels and internal equipment. Coupled with

tracking software, they can facilitate quicker turnaround to the end recipient and help track and protect internal assets as well.

Smart lockers are fairly common on higher education campuses but are not yet ubiquitous. Tracking software adoption is somewhat mixed as well.

Overall, parcels seem to take one to two days between the time they're received and the time the end recipient picks up the package. More than a third of respondents said the whole process takes a day or less. Nearly 19 percent said two days. About 12.5 percent said it takes three to five days. And a very large percentage said “I don't know” (20.83 percent) or “other” (12.5 percent).

INVESTING IN PARCEL LOCKER SOLUTIONS AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE PLANS TO INVEST, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION⁸

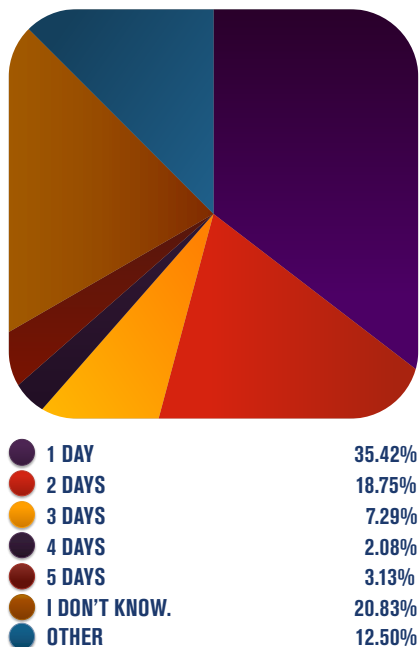


WE HAVE ALREADY INVESTED IN PARCEL LOCKER SOLUTIONS ON CAMPUS.	41.94%
WE ARE PLANNING TO INVEST IN THE NEAR FUTURE.	3.22%
WE ARE CURRENTLY LOOKING AT PARCEL LOCKER SOLUTIONS.	9.67%
WE MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN THE FUTURE.	45.17%

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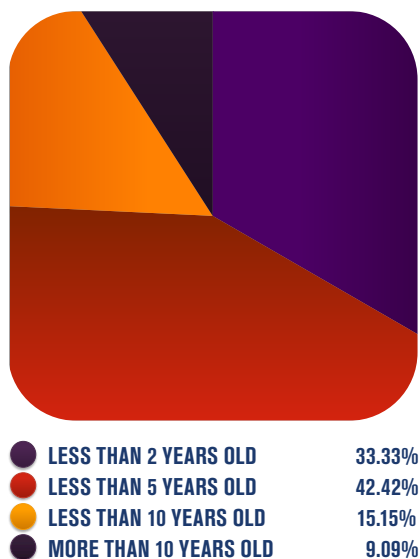
“WHAT IS THE AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME BETWEEN RECEIVING THE PACKAGE, ALERTING THE RECIPIENT AND THE RECIPIENT PICKING IT UP?”⁹



On the tracking side of the equation, 40 percent of respondents said they use tracking software for valuable internal equipment, such as computers, tablets and the like. Another 20 percent use an internally developed tracking system. A substantial 40 percent said they track equipment manually.

Thirty-six percent of respondents said they are using some sort of tracking system for parcels and packages. Of those who reported having a system in place, a substantial portion (almost 76 percent) have a

AGE OF EXISTING MAIL/PARCEL TRACKING SYSTEM, FALL 2020, HIGHER EDUCATION¹⁰



system that is less than five years old.

Of those who reported that their institutions do not currently have a tracking system in place for mail/parcels, about 9.8 percent are planning to invest in the near future or are considering options. Almost two-thirds (65.9 percent) said they have no plans to invest in a tracking system. The remainder said they might be interested in the future.

Conclusion

We're only just beginning to get a picture of the impact of COVID restrictions on campus operations and will continue to probe the education sector to learn how they have been

affected and which changes will carry over as campuses begin reopening.

Methodology

For this survey, Spaces4Learning polled our readership through an online survey that ran through November, 2020. Responses came primarily from public and private four-year institutions (73.2 percent). The remainder were from two-year colleges (23.71), trade/vocational institutions (1.03 percent) and graduate-only institutions (3.09 percent).

Sources

1: Spaces4Learning reader survey, Fall 2020

2-10: Spaces4Learning/Quadient mailroom survey, Fall 2020

About Quadient

Parcel Pending by Quadient is the leading provider of package management solutions for residential, commercial, retail, and university properties in the United States and Canada. With nearly 3 million packages successfully delivered monthly, we offer a wide range of solutions that ensure the simple and secure delivery and retrieval of packages and online orders. With the strength of our combined power, reach, and offerings, Parcel Pending by Quadient provides state-of-the-art solutions and world-class customer service to solve the last-mile delivery challenge.

For more information about Quadient, visit quadient.com.

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