

COVID-19 POLICY COMPLIANCE AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN EDUCATION BUSINESS AT ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY, UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic is a reality. With it came the lockdown as first measure to ensure social distancing. This raised question as to whether Universities and other tertiary institutions could be run as normal business. St Lawrence University set out to establish a COVID-19 Task Force and to develop a COVID-19 guiding policy to which it must adhere to sail through the pandemic and also survive the new normal business situation. However, the need to ensure continuous monitoring of compliance was found important and an assessment checklist was developed. Compliance to the policy alone would be missing a step if likely business ethics issues were not considered. So, this paper presents policy concerns and guidelines as well as means for assessment of education business compliance. The ethical consideration of parameters and indicators developed is presented.

Key words: COVID-19, pandemic, policy, compliance, ethics, education business

INTRODUCTION

Since December 2019, the World was infected by a new virus, which started in Wuhan City, China (FAO and WHO, 2020). The virus is genetically new, human bodies experienced it for the first time, and so there was neither immunity nor known cure. According to science, the search for a vaccine could only be completed after a minimum of 18 months. It was also believed that the virus had come to stay, and as such human being had to get adapted to it or perish! The Government of Uganda decided for a lockdown and Universities were suddenly closed on the 19th March 2020. By this time academic programmes had not been completed for final year students, and semester courses were yet to

be completed for continuing students. Furthermore, most students had not fully paid tuition. It was unfortunate that the faculty had not prepared necessary electronic learning materials. This scenario calls for a new-normal biologically, academically and social-economically. It is for this reason that St. Lawrence University set out to develop a COVID-19 policy (SLAU, 2020) which would guide her future management, operations and sustainable development towards a chartered status.

St Lawrence University is a private registered and legally licensed University education business. She has few resident and majority non-resident students commuting to the campus on a daily basis. Most of these students reside in down town areas around the University. These are walkable distances but their residential areas have communities which are very vulnerable to COVID-19 spread. As such SLAU students stand risk of being exposed, and hence contaminating the campus community. The staff is also a commuting staff. Some staff drive to Campus, while others walk to campus from nearby areas or use public transport on a daily basis. So, like the case of students, staff may also be a source of COVID-19 inoculum. It is also important to note that SLAU has Ugandan, regional and international students. Regional and international students would have to travel to SLAU when the lockdown is lifted, but there are issues of boarder closing and flight arrangements which might prevent them from coming back.

Safety and health of staff and students is paramount at all times. "Mensa sana in corpore sana" (A healthy mind in a healthy body). Thus, in all her business, safety and health must be ensured for her sustainable performance. This COVID-19 policy comes in handy to complement SLAU's Safety, Security and Health Policy, as well as the continued implementation of the Academic and Research Policy.

However, in all compliance activities, ethical considerations are very central. Any disregard of ethical behavior may result into a multiplicity of other management problems for the University.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted based on primary and secondary data collection. Primary data was generated through observation of the situation at St. Lawrence University at the inception of the lockdown and development of new education business guidelines. Secondary data was collected from policies and related information that was provided by Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), Ministry of Health (MoH) and their agencies. Business ethics knowledge derived from the Globethics (www.globethics.net) was applied (YILMAZ,2009). It is purely a descriptive case study.

RESULTS

POLICY GUIDELINES

Policy guidelines (SLAU, 2020) are presented below to guide SLAU business during the lockdown, likely phased partial re-opening and post – pandemic new-normal sustainable development process towards the Chartered status and beyond.

SANITATION AND HEALTH

Health of both staff and students shall be a daily focus. The University and members of the University community shall ensure adequate sanitation measures that prevent contamination and spread of the COVID-19 flue disease. Such measures shall be freely available on campus at all times and in all key positions of the campus.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Both safety and security of staff, students and visitors shall be ensured by the Estates Department of St. Lawrence University. Adequate staff shall be diploid to ensure safety and security on campus. The University shall fully facilitate the Estates Department in regard to realizing these objectives

EDUCATION AND SAFETY

To ensure compliance to all set guidelines, appropriate education arrangements, facilities and methods shall be applied beyond business as usual. As part of the duty, staff shall be mandated to take initiative and appropriately implement all new measures, while students shall also be obliged to comply. Participatory methods shall be encouraged as long as they do not lead to violation of set guidelines.

FINANCIAL SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY

In line with the University financial manual, all mechanisms shall be engaged to ensure sustainability of St. Lawrence University, in spite of the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the University shall continue to save guard its tradition of maintaining ethical behavior.

RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised new questions, and caused new social-economic situations both at the University and in the community. As a centre of excellence with a research and community engagement mandate, St. Lawrence University shall strategically initiate activities to investigate arising questions, and recommend to the community innovative adaptation as well as mitigation measures.

SELF CLAIM AND CERTIFICATION

St Lawrence University treasures in its innovative culture. As such, SLAU shall proudly ostend her successful compliance with her COVID-19 Policy (SLAU, 2020), as well as with Government set measures to adapt and mitigate against the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To assess compliance, a series of parameters and indicators were developed (MoES, 2020; SLAU, 2020¹). Ethical issues related with each indicator were identified and listed for consideration to ensure ethical behavior all through the compliance exercise. Indicators for each guideline parameter are provided in tables 1 – 6 below. Compliance with set guidelines is determined based on presence of given parameter indicators. Presence of indicators is presented as a percentage fulfillment (%), and each parameter is scored using the Likert scale (1- 5), where 1 = 0 – 20%, 2 = 21- 40%, 3 = 41 –60%, 4 = 61 –80%, 5 = 81 – 100%. The best compliance to a set guideline is that whose parameter is scored on average 100%.

Table 1 Sanitation and health

Guideline Parameters	Compliance Indicator/verifications	Compliance Percentage	Score	Ethical Compliance Remarks
a- Gate alert	-Responsible person, -Effective checking, -Temp. Gun, -Careful observation, -Social distancing			Ethical as long as checking is gender sensitive
b-Safety on campus	-Spread points, -Responsible persons, -Careful observations -Hand washing facs, -Sanitizers -Waste baskets/bins, -Cameras			No ethical concerns, though Cameras may not be in washrooms
c-Safety at the gate	-Responsible person, -Temp. Gun -Hand washing facs, -Sanitizers -Careful Observation, -Record of suspects, -Social distancing			Need be ethical by ensuring gender sensitivity,
d-Staff and student alert	-Orientation posters, -Number of staff and students washing, -Reported suspects, -Periodic alerts -Numbers with masks, -Social distancing			In reporting suspects ethical being honour is needed by not allowing victimizing each other and wrongly reporting
e-COVID-19 responsive community	-Number of posters, -Spread of posters, -Numbers at posters -Numbers washing, -Numbers with masks. -Well fitted masks, -Social distancing			Those with breathing disabilities such as asthmatic conditions need ethical consideration
f-Health Centre preparedness	-Key Contacts, -Info. on CD-19, -Responsible person, -Isolation facility, -Protective gears -Protected nurses, -Hand washing -Sanitizers, -Social distancing -Sample taking vials and scoopers			Shall there be isolation areas for female and male? Gender sensitivity is key to implementing isolation.
g-Vaccination	-Staff and students with vaccination certificates			There is fear of fake vaccine. Students and staff need be sensitized about the vaccine to be ethical.

Table 2 Safety and security

Guideline Parameters	Compliance Indicator/verifications	Compliance Percentage	Score	Ethical Compliance Remarks
a-Effective security	-Sensitization certificates, -alert at duty,-Enforce measures			Security persons must also be well protected to be ethical.
b-Single entry point	-Only main gate open to access campus			No ethical issues if the gate shall not end up to be a red tape to entering the campus by segregating behaviours
c-Surveillance at gate	-Responsible person, -Temp. Gun -Hand washing facs, -Sanitizers -Careful Observation, -Record of suspects, -Social distancing			Gender sensitivity and absence of segregation key to ethical behavior at the gate.
d-Protected in coming community	-Recommended masks put on -Sanitized, -Hands washed, -Social distancing observed			Those with breathing disabilities such as asthmatic conditions need ethical consideration

e-Social distancing	-Surveillance cameras. - a dive response team. -2m spaced seats in all places. -no crowding in any place. -organized entering and exiting of facilities. - students separated in time by timetableing. - e-learning facilities and screens. - e-meetings			Friendly students and those living together need be identified for fare consideration. Otherwise these may be considered not socially-distancing and be denied entry.
f-Isolation rooms	-Isolation room. - isolated suspects record			Gender sensitivity is key to ethical behavior in isolation.
g-Sanitation everywhere	-Washing antiseptics. -sanitizers. cleaning persons. -cleaning roster			Maintaining quality of sanitizers is paramount here.
h-Safety in Hostels	-Hostels sensitized about SLAU COVID-19 Policy. -signed joint implementation agreements.-SLAU students in partner Hostels only.- SLAU hostels surveillance team. - periodic M&E visits and reports			Ethical behavior of Hostel owners is a determinant of effectiveness of this measure.

Table 3 EDUCATION AND SAFETY

Guideline Parameters	Compliance Indicator/Verification	Compliance Percentage	Score	Remarks
a-E-reading materials	-Soft form Modules for all courses			It is not ethical to eliminate students from poor families and without access to e-facilities.
b-Accessible e-materials	-Electronic reading materials online SLAU website			How accessible is an ethical issue as it brings about variations in teaching and learning.
c-E-learning Distance learning	-E-learning distance learning possible from student residences -Isolated students study -Isolated students are assessed			This is very ethical. In that being in quarantine or isolation is not being denied access to study.
d-Social distancing of combined classes	-Students of large classes social-distanced in space -Networked screens in use for lectures -Zoom classes			It will be ethical if screens shall be provided by the University with equitable access.
e-Staff competent in e-learning	-Staff e-learning courses participation lists, schedules -E-learning courses certificates -Staff developed e-learning materials in use			It is ethical for all staff to be at the same level of e-learning competence.
f-Electronically administered exams	-E-learning examination system -E-learning examination schedules			Not ethical if some students shall not be able to access e-examination.
g-Efficient tuition collection	-Mid-semester exams on timetable -Student tuition payment plan -Tuition Mid-semester remittance records			This is tricky and may not be ethical for parents have also been equally affected by COVID-19 lockdown and so may not be able to pay tuition in time.

h-Exam scripts safe	-Safe handling of scripts using gloves and masks -Safe storage for some days before marking -Electronic examination systems			It will not be ethical for an infected student to receive into papers and submit them for marking.
i-Traceability of suspected contacts	-Filled and signed staff and students lecture attendance forms -Cameras in lecture halls -Lecture footage records			Confidentiality of camera footage and hidden application shall help to avoid intimidating students in exam.

Table 4 Financial safety and sustainability

Guidelines Parameters	Compliance Indicator/Verification	Compliance Percentage	Score	Remarks
a-Timely recovery of tuition	-Mid-semester payment of tuition -Higher percentage of tuition recovery by mid-semester -More students qualify for E-learning off-campus -Tuition payment records -Register of students with e-learning access passwords			Necessary evil. Some students may not be able to afford due to effects of the pandemic. This situation must be ethically handled.
b-Facilitated budget for compliance to COVID-19 pandemic	-Proposals submitted to partners -Funded COVID-19 projects			It may not be ethical to pressurize the University to meet compliance budgets for there has been no earnings
c-Streamlined and manageable wage bill	-New salary payment guidelines -Reduced Wage bill burden -Timely salary payments -Results based performance and better Value for money/Accountability -Staff performance improved -RBM forms filled and signed			The University must not under pay its workers. Ethically their work should be paid for adequately. Staff too must ethically perform to be paid.
d-Value for money best practices	-Essential Staff weekly reports -Essential Executive Staff monthly RBM reports -Lecturers' monthly RBM reports			It is ethical to practice Results based management, and pay according to work done.

table 5 Research and community engagement

Guideline Parameter	Compliance Indicator/Verification	Compliance Percentage	Score	Remarks
a-Research performed on COVID-19	-Research proposals developed and implemented -Research reports -Research papers published			Given that human subjects are involved in this research, ethical consideration is important.
b-Communities engaged during COVID-19 during and after the lock down	-Outreach proposals -Outreach reports			Given the involvement of people in the community, ethical consideration of outreach programmes shall be a must.

Table 6 Self claim and certification

Guidelines Parameters	Compliance Indicator/Verification	Compliance Percentage	Score	Remarks
a- Active COVID-19 Task Force	-Task Force members -Task Force developed work plan -Task Force meetings minutes -Reports			Gender sensitivity and representation key to ethical practice
b-Anti-COVID-19 measures implementation	-Compliance assessment reports -Compliance Certificate -Compliance Statement			Ethical consideration and compliance is a must.
c-Compliance visibility	-SLAU Compliance Certificate and Statement uploaded into the website			There must not be any favoritism. Certification should be based on real compliance and fare assessment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As much as the COVID-19 pandemic came with a sudden lockdown, Universities have the obligation to maintain ethical behavior. A University community has both staff and students who are either female or male, youth or adults. This implies serious consideration of gender sensitivity at all times. However there are many occasions for violation of best practice and ethical behavior in implementation of COVID-19 guidelines. Therefore, as policies and compliance measures are being institutionalized, it is im-

portant that implied ethical consideration is equally looked into carefully.

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