

Benchmark of communications approaches to coronavirus with international peers.

In times of crisis, the public need to know that universities are at the vanguard of the fight against the global pandemic. They are not, as the minister of education claimed, [closed](#). In fact, the state universities' positioning has been commendable, pointing out that the universities will continue to function, protect its community with distancing, and crucially continue vital research activities.

This is a short review of how other world leading universities are communicating with the outside world to explain how they are combatting the virus. Only cases of best practice are commented on here.

Harvard places its news at the first point of entry, with resources on the [development of public health apps](#), linking their [coronavirus update](#), with similar content to USP's directly to the front page. **MIT** is also maintaining a [microsite](#) explaining the research the university is doing, as well as focusing on the [diagnostic measures that the university is developing](#). Similarly, **Stanford** has an easily accessible student information page, while their news pieces are taken up with communications with the external community, focusing not just on the medical dimensions, but also on [education for home schooling](#), as well as [sociology](#). Expanding the narrow focus on medicine towards other areas has produced some informative and valuable resources.

Johns Hopkins University has perhaps been the most prominent university in coronavirus communication, with the excellent [coronavirus dashboard](#) becoming a point of reference for media, academia and the general public. It supplies [a global map](#), [mortality analyses](#), among a number of other useful and intuitive resources.

Imperial College was the first to deploy its epidemiology department to a global approach, [developing the initial curve models](#), which Imperial shows not only from its own communications, but [links to reputable news sources](#) to demonstrate this impact.

The University of Oxford has taken an excellent didactic approach, with an explanation of the [global research priorities](#) for coronavirus, as well as a [detailed explanation of the university's research](#). **The University of Birmingham** is encouraging [public debate](#) on responsible business practices from its embeddedness and local impact, attempting to maintain the university as a source of local authority and debate.

UNAM's Comision de Covid19, has a direct link from the university homepage, like USP's, with a more public health orientation, including downloadable and printable flyers for public information, while **UBA** is focused only on [public health advice](#).

The National University of Singapore is highlighting the individual researchers' contribution to combatting the crisis around the world, as well as [maintaining up-to-date news and resources](#). The focus on individuals helps the public to visualise how scientists are contributing in an immediate way. **The Weizmann Institute of Science** has produced an insightful page that combines individual expertise and useful public knowledge. The

University of Copenhagen is highlighting the [€2.7 million grant it has received from the EU for vaccine development](#).

For the state universities, [USP has a consolidated communications channel](#) for research and university activity, as well as [a well designed donations channel for research](#) that goes to the foundation, but for a specific end. The [STI website](#) has separated the guides for teachers and students from this, offering a range of tools and training, while [there is an offering of online courses](#).

Unicamp has launched an [Open Innovation platform for covid-19](#) bringing together researchers from a number of fields, but also opening this process and discussions to the public for them to see science happening in real time, something that brought [prominent media attention](#).

Unesp have focused on [stories where their excellence has translated into local impact](#), with laboratories repurposed for testing, as well as a contribution from [Unesp's strongest areas of knowledge](#) contributing to public understanding of the virus, outside of a limited medical science approach.

The federal universities adopt a more direct, news-focused approach, not offering opinion or perspective. **UFABC** highlight [how they are helping the ABC region](#), and the [funding received for initiatives](#).

Unifesp highlight the [organisation of research groups](#), and a [dedicated information page for the internal community](#), as well as a [donation page](#) for the foundation with the total raised, as well as a description of the equipment donated.

UFSCar have a [dedicated page](#) for coronavirus news, highlighting official decisions and news from inside the university to help students and staff.

Conclusion and recommendations

The state universities have produced excellent material on efforts to combat the coronavirus, comparing very favourably with the world's best. The very best are specifically differentiating internal communications for staff and students from reports on research efforts, considering them for separate audiences. This makes it clear which items are of interest to their internal communities (campus news) and which are appealing to the wider community. Furthermore, they are making both of these enticing and available from their home page, rather than expecting the public to enter university newspapers or magazines. The links above are no more than one click from the landing page, and all have descriptions on the landing page of what is contained inside the link.

A focus beyond just medical sciences is advisable; engaging social, applied and other basic sciences have a major role to play in the immediate, medium and long term impacts of this crisis. Their role should be highlighted, and encouraging public debate would be a good way of reaching beyond the university's walls at a time where the federal government has failed

in its job as a communicator and provider of basic services, the university can act as a strong voice of reason and reassurance to society.

Even universities from non-English speaking backgrounds are communicating in both English and their native languages. This is something that should be strongly considered by the universities. Global science is engaged in a huge collective effort around a single shared challenge – the ability to communicate the individual university’s contribution to the whole will be important for institutional visibility.

Harvard

<https://www.harvard.edu/>

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/03/tool-to-help-decision-makers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/series/coronavirus/>

MIT

<https://covid19.mit.edu/>

<https://news.mit.edu/2020/covid-19-diagnostic-test-prevention-0312>

Stanford University

<https://www.stanford.edu/>

<https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/13/upgrading-lessons-kids-home-school-closures/>

<https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/19/try-distant-socializing-instead/>

Johns Hopkins University

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

Imperial College London

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/world/europe/coronavirus-imperial-college-johnson.html>

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/196234/covid19-imperial-researchers-model-likely-impact/>

Oxford University

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-03-13-coronavirus-covid-19-research-priorities>

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus-research>

University of Birmingham

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/responsible-business-covid-19.aspx>

UNAM

<https://covid19comisionunam.unamglobal.com/>

UBA

<http://www.uba.ar/>

National University of Singapore

<http://news.nus.edu.sg/research/nus-experts-forefront-covid-19-fight>

<http://news.nus.edu.sg/highlights/latest-covid-19>

Weizmann Institute of Science

<https://www.weizmann.ac.il/WeizmannCompass/tags/coronavirus>

University of Copenhagen

<https://healthsciences.ku.dk/newsfaculty-news/2020/03/ucph-researchers-receive-eu-grant-for-vaccine-against-coronavirus/>

Universidade de São Paulo

<https://coronavirus.usp.br/>

<https://www5.usp.br/uspvida/>

<https://www.sti.usp.br/en/>

<https://www5.usp.br/ensino/cursos-on-line/>

Unicamp

<https://covid.ic.unicamp.br/>

<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-52146248?fbclid=IwAR3OxoTYBXoTV7hzcXmQCJHf1gixJWu-gZhyxrrBKeJeHfYqEj6Zb78heWg>

Unesp

<https://www2.unesp.br/portal#!/noticia/35660/unesp-entrega-primeiros-resultados-de-testes-em-araraquara/>

<https://www2.unesp.br/portal#!/noticia/35662/os-morcegos-e-os-virus-mortais/>

Unifesp

<https://unifesp.br/boletins-anteriores/item/4401-propgpq-estrutura-grupo-sobre-a-covid-19-em-seis-grandes-temas>

<https://www.unifesp.br/coronavirus>

<https://unifesp.br/doehsp>

UFABC

<http://www.ufabc.edu.br/noticias/ufabc-obtem-r-488-mil-reais-do-mec-para-combate-a-covid-19>

<http://www.ufabc.edu.br/noticias/edital-aprova-iniciativas-de-combate-a-pandemia-da-covid-19>

UFScar

<https://www2.ufscar.br/covid19>