Mansfield residents, local business owners, and those who work in the Town of Mansfield were invited to participate in a Thoughtexchange through social media and emails from the Town of Mansfield and the Mansfield Downtown Partnership. The exchange was open from July 28th through August 6th. A total of 567 people participated (see Table 1 for demographic information). Caution should be exerted when generalizing the findings to the larger Mansfield population of over 26,000 individuals.

Procedure: Thoughtexchange participants were asked a series of demographic questions and how informed they feel about UConn’s reopening plan. Then, participants generated their own thoughts, questions, and/or concerns about UConn reopening its Storrs campus in response to an open-ended question (see below) and were given the opportunity to rate their level of agreement with randomly selected thoughts shared by other participants (1 to 5 stars, with more stars representing more agreement).

Question: What are your thoughts, questions, and/or concerns about UConn reopening its Storrs campus in August?

Table 1: Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>N (% of total sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-34</td>
<td>59 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-54</td>
<td>291 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-74</td>
<td>135 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 or older</td>
<td>19 (4%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year-Round Mansfield resident</th>
<th>N (% of total sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>444 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71 (14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own a business or work at a non-UConn business in Mansfield</th>
<th>N (% of total sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>113 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>390 (77%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current undergraduate, graduate, or postdoc at UConn Storrs campus</th>
<th>N (% of total sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>477 (93%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current UConn employee</th>
<th>N (% of total sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>125 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| No                     | 384 (75%)             

8% endorsed “not informed”
61% endorsed “somewhat informed”
31% endorsed “very informed”

1 A Thoughtexchange is a tool for assessing community members’ perspectives on a particular issue or question.
Main Findings

- **Concerns about community spread, off-campus students, and adherence to COVID-19 prevention recommendations** were the top three themes when looking at either the total number of thoughts reported or the level of agreement with thoughts. Figure 1 shows the total number of thoughts by theme categories.

![Figure 1: Total number of thoughts by theme categories](image)

- Highest rated thoughts within each theme are presented in the Appendix. The **top three rated thoughts** were:

  1) “None of the materials sent to students about safe practices makes mention of the larger community and how their actions can impact our residents. Families lives, livelihood, and educations are put at risk by students’ choices.”

  2) “Sending college students home again will be worse than if they did not come back until the pandemic is under better control. Risking so many new exposures now is the wrong approach. Start the semester in January 2021.”

  3) “Seriously concerned about off campus, unsupervised students residing in Mansfield who have the attitude “I live for today and the hell with tomorrow.” I can see them going to parties with no mask and without social distancing, spreading the virus to others while shopping around town and attending school.”

- The most frequently mentioned words in participants’ responses are captured in the word cloud below.
• Residents are worried about the influx of students, especially from higher-risk areas of the country. Some indicated that while Mansfield has been relatively protected from COVID-19, students coming from hotspots in other states will cause a spike in infections.

• There is great concern that COVID-19 will spread from the campus to the community, particularly through anticipated off-campus events like parties and large social gatherings but also through exposures at downtown businesses and with UConn students teaching/volunteering in local schools.

• There is skepticism about adherence to behavioral recommendations such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing, and many questions were raised about how compliance with COVID-19 prevention behaviors will be enforced, most notably in off-campus settings.

• Off-campus students generate a lot of worry among respondents. There is a perception that students have been pushed out of dorms and into off-campus housing with little oversight. Several shared concerns that students who returned over the summer are already hosting large gatherings that put the community at risk.

• Several questions were raised about the pre-semester quarantine in August including whether students would be compliant and what additional strain this will put on town resources. Others questioned the adequacy of the university’s testing plans.

• Many requested frequent updates from UConn about the number of COVID-19 cases as well as detailed information about how an outbreak will be contained and what will trigger a campus shutdown.

• Some expressed strong feelings that UConn should remain closed, perhaps even until a vaccine becomes available, and instead offer virtual classes. Some questioned the motivations for opening in the first place, with a belief that financial considerations are driving decisions rather than public health.

• There is worry that town resources, including contact tracing and hospital capacity, will be overwhelmed as UConn and local schools reopen at the same time. Some suggested staggering the start time of UConn and Mansfield’s K-12 schools.

• UConn’s reopening is a factor in some local residents’ decisions to send their own children to school or to frequent local businesses.

• Forty-three respondents (7.6%) voiced support for the reopening, endorsing statements indicating it is important for UConn to reopen both for students’ experiences as well as for local businesses. A much larger group of respondents (n=217; 38.3%) endorsed statements reflecting significant concern about community spread of COVID-19 due to social gatherings and lack of adherence to mask wearing, physical distancing, etc. These groups both endorsed statements reflecting concerns about off-campus students and parties, as well as the virus being brought into the community by faculty and staff. Clear rules and guidelines for students, faculty, staff, and residents as well as educating students and others about community expectations were important to a large segment of respondents, regardless of whether they support the reopening or not.

Recommendations about how to address these concerns around found in the Appendix below.
Appendix
Top Rated Thoughts for Each Theme and Associated Recommendations

*Note: Some of these recommendations may already be in place, but need to be communicated with the community.

Community Spread

- None of the materials sent to students about safe practices makes mention of the larger community & how their actions can impact our residents. Families lives, livelihoods and educations are put at risk by students’ choices.

- I am concerned that the students won’t follow the guidelines the University has established and that COVID-19 will reoccur in Mansfield & nearby towns. We have worked so hard to decrease COVID and have such a low infection rate. I would like it to stay this way. Students don’t take the virus seriously.

- I’m concerned about student parties and other potential super spreader events. It was an issue in the spring and there continues to be activity over the summer.

- I am concerned that the COVID-19 numbers will go up in our town. I hope that we can all consider the health of our vulnerable neighbors.

- The faculty and staff of UCONN will potentially be exposed to COVID-19, brought to campus by the returning students. Faculty and staff have families with spouses, parents, and children that will then be exposed to the virus and further the spread to the community.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Strengthen UConn’s messaging to students, faculty, and staff coming to the Storrs campus about how their choices impact campus and the local community; (2) Create high visibility messages emphasizing that the campus sits within a larger community, and mutual respect is needed to keep each other healthy; (3) Examine policies regarding UConn students working in local schools and consider what additional safeguards can be put in place (e.g., more frequent testing for those working in the community?); (4) Consider extending protected hours at local business for high-risk individuals to decrease their exposure.

Off-Campus Students

- Seriously concerned about off campus, unsupervised students residing in Mansfield who have the attitude “I live for today and the hell with tomorrow.” I can see them going to parties with no mask and without social distancing spreading the virus to others while shopping around town and attending school.

- Many students who were denied housing are living off campus, but will come to campus to meet friends, study, etc. No mandatory testing for them. Off-site housing more likely to have larger gatherings. No mandated testing. Potential for spread of virus.

- Commuters not tested. Many also have jobs. Potential for spread of virus if not tested.

- I’m concerned about the lack of oversight (testing and tracing) off-campus students who relocate to Mansfield but take all classes online. This could lead to considerable community spread.

- What about students living off campus in residential neighborhoods. What requirements/ restrictions will be placed upon these students? It has been apparent over the summer here in town that students in off campus housing have continued to congregate. This increases concerns for town.
RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Provide updated information about whether more students are in living off-campus this year compared to prior years; (2) Share information about efforts being made to increase compliance among off-campus students to COVID-19 prevention recommendations; (3) Include students living off-campus in the immediate vicinity of UConn in testing protocols (i.e., entry testing, random testing).

Adherence to COVID-19 Prevention Recommendations

- I'm concerned about UConn students not complying with the health regulations. I have already seen residential students not wearing masks and socializing close to each other. If my young kids can wear masks, so can a 19 year old.

- I'm concerned about students not taking social distancing guidelines seriously among themselves (having parties, etc.) This could spread the virus quickly within the student community and it might spill into the town population.

- I would like all UConn students to wear masks when frequenting downtown Storrs shops and open spaces.

- I am concerned about the students NOT adhering to the social distancing policy, and/or, not wearing the masks they are supposed to wear. I feel it will definitely spread more quickly, with the students not following the protocol.

- I have seen groups of students in the Storrs Downtown area with no masks and no social distancing. This is not part of UConn, but who is supposed to "police" this area? None of this is good! We will be the next hot spot.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Create a joint public health campaign between the university and the town emphasizing the importance of adherence to COVID-19 prevention recommendations on- and off-campus; (2) Mandate mask wearing in public places with associated warnings and fines; (3) Create a student advisory board that works with the Town of Mansfield to improve Town/Gown relations; (4) Provide suggestions to all parties (students, faculty, staff, residents, business owners, and those who work in Mansfield) for how to effectively communicate with individuals who are not adhering to behavioral recommendations.

Enforcement and Control

- How will you control the students that live on and off campus from having parties and gathering in large groups? This is one of the most important things in preventing the virus.

- Students are already walking around Big Y without masks---how are you mandating mask wearing around town? How will you enforce it? This is for everyone's safety.

- How will the town enforce the behavior of all residents? This isn't just a student issue. The town is growing by 8,000 people and we already have people not following guidelines

- How will we deal with the students who don’t respect social distancing or wear masks or party? How do we deal with residents who do the same?

- I think students, faculty, staff, and residents need clear rules and guidelines to follow. For instance, is it ok to walk around downtown maskless? When we know what the rules are, it’s easier to follow and enforce them.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Develop signage and messaging clearly stating the rules and guidelines that all individuals (students, staff, faculty, residents, business owners, and those who work in Mansfield) are expected to adhere to - for example, it needs to be clearly stated if masks are mandatory inside every business regardless of physical distance or when walking downtown; (2) State enforcement policies for COVID-19 related behaviors
for students and residents; (3) See recommendations in Adherence to COVID-19 Prevention Recommendations section.

**Testing and Symptom Monitoring**

- I’m concerned that tests will be limited and/or take too long for results as the pandemic rages out of control. This is already an issue and is likely to get worse in the fall.

- Testing doesn’t matter without an immediate result. Asymptomatic student gets tested, and lives their life awaiting result... goes to blaze, goes to villa, goes to CVS, goes to big y and price chopper, goes to party w friends, finds out they’re positive. Whoops.

- UConn must make testing facilities available to off-campus students; nearby testing locations' requirements make many students ineligible for testing. I am an off-campus student living in Windham who must use the library and attend doctor’s visits in Storrs. Access to testing is very limited.

- I am most worried about commuter students living in Mansfield who are not required to be tested for COVID-19.

- I do not believe the random testing plan suggested is sufficient. Perhaps UConn should look at the model Yale is following? Shopping and using medical services in town will be very worrisome with 8,000 "outsiders" converging upon Mansfield.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Share information with the community about testing protocol, length of time to get results, etc.; (2) Make testing available to off-campus students; (3) Provide a rationale for the testing frequency selected as opposed to other models.

**Quarantine**

- The first two weeks back is a crazy idea! No other school is doing this. It will be like the old Spring weekends unless UConn goes into lockdown. Nobody is regulating off campus.

- UCONN will not have the ability to effectively quarantine the students returning, but rather will be community living on and off campus. This will only further the spread of the virus into the population of students by exposing those not affected to those that have the virus.

- I don’t believe that undergraduate students will quarantine approximately. They will bring COVID from other states.

- If the students are not in class and in town for 2 weeks, what will theses students be doing - parties, etc... Stresses fire departments & state police.

- I am concerned with students returning 2 weeks early to self-quarantine, when really many will be partying. It is already happening on our street. I don’t believe most students will follow guidelines for self-quarantine and our numbers in town will rise.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Acknowledge the community’s concerns about the pre-semester quarantine; (2) Strengthen messaging to students about the importance of maintaining the campus bubble during that period – post clear information about what is and is not allowed; (3) Strongly discourage students from going to downtown Storrs and local businesses during that period; (4) Share information about enforcement plan.
Communication and Working Together

- How are local residents going to be updated about rates of COVID infection should they spike again and how is the campus going to prevent parties?

- How will UConn share information about the spread of COVID-19 on campus with the Mansfield community? Understanding the status of the UConn campus will affect decisions about our behavior in the community (going to the grocery store, health facilities).

- Just today the NY Times published a piece that provided some information about the virus in the UCONN community. Where/how will accurate info be found? Accurate information is important for decision making & to maintain confidence in the partnership between town & university.

- Mansfield has a pop. of 26K more or less. UConn is bringing in 8000 *on campus* -- and who knows how many will live off campus? The impact is huge. The joint letter refers to town/gown working closely together? Really? Why are town residents just hearing about this then? When were we included?

- Full disclosure of positive and presumptive positive COVID-19 needs to be provided. The community needs to assess the risk of exposure created by the UConn positivity rate and adjust their behavior according

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Create a public facing dashboard displaying number of confirmed and suspected cases on campus and in the community; (2) Involve the local community earlier in the decision process about COVID-19 related issues; (3) Host monthly townhall meetings with UConn and Town of Mansfield leaders to address residents’ concerns.

Out-of-State Students

- Flying nearly 10,000 students from all over the country back to tiny Storrs in the middle of a global pandemic seems like an absurdly bad idea. Connecticut has succeeded in keeping on top of this pandemic, generally; reintroducing a tsunami of students back to the area is a recipe for disaster.

- I am concerned that students will be coming to our town from other states. The likelihood of students bringing COVID to our area is high.

- Bringing students for all over (including from states with alarming COVID-19 infection rates) is very worrisome. Students will bring the virus to our community.

- I am concerned about the influx of students from around the country and the potential for outbreaks in our community. With increased socialization, partying and gatherings, the risk for transmission increases.

- I am concerned about students returning and bringing COVID-19 into our community. This part of the state has been luckier than others. UConn students are coming from all over. I have already seen large gatherings of students. Many are walking around Storrs Center without masks.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Acknowledge the community’s legitimate concerns about out-of-state students and risk that brings to Mansfield; (2) Underscore measures put in place to minimize community spread (e.g., public health campaign, pre-semester quarantine, mandatory testing with ongoing surveillance); (3) Provide updated information about UConn’s testing, tracing, quarantining, and isolating policies.
Town

- Are local health facilities prepared for a possible localized "hot spot" if COVID does spread once students are back?

- As a parent of an EO Smith student, UConn’s reopening impacts my decision to send my high schooler back when each institution is so close in proximity. It is an awfully large population in tight quarters.

- Is there a plan to augment local community hospital facilities that may be overburdened by the spread of the coronavirus on the UConn campus? Our previous healthcare structure cannot sustain a surge of thousands of cases of coronavirus into our small community hospitals.

- Are there resources in the town for contact tracing?

- We should stagger the start of UConn and the local schools so they are not starting at the same time. We should consider delaying the start of MPS. This increases the risk of contact and exposure. By staggering starts, we can gauge risk at the local level and make better decisions about reopening.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS**: (1) Share information with residents about hospital capacity and resources available for contact tracing; (2) UConn should notify the town when they are at full isolation capacity; and (3) Consider staggering the start date of schools.

Virtual/Remote Option

- Sending college students home again will be worse than if they did not come back until the pandemic is under better control. Risking so many new exposures now is the wrong approach. Start the semester in January 2021.

- All students should be given the option (and encouraged to) of taking the entire fall semester from their home, without needing to be in Connecticut.

- I think UCONN should stay online until there is a vaccine to at least cut the chances of a spread.

- Being a resident of Mansfield I do not think that UConn should open at all. Doing classes on line is just fine till we get through this pandemic. Please think of all people in this town.

- Shut down UConn to all but essential lab-based student learning The risk to Mansfield's population and businesses is too great for a large student body to be present. COVID WILL increase and spread.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS**: (1) Share information with the community about UConn’s online offerings – all students were given the option of taking the entire semester from home; (2) Report the number of students returning to campus versus participating virtually and the number of classes being taught virtually versus in-person.

Outbreak

- Having lived in residence halls during my undergrad years, it terrifies me to think about how rapidly and efficiently COVID-19 would spread at UConn. Even with reduced-capacity housing and dining halls doing take-out only, there's no effective way to prevent 18-year-olds from socializing.
• I’d also like to see detailed information about what will trigger a "shelter in place" scenario at UConn if infections increase. Understanding what UConn’s and the Town’s plans will help me keep my family safe and decide whether to send my children back to Mansfield schools.

• How will UConn respond to outbreaks to protect the Mansfield community?

• Is there a metric in place to consider when and how the campus should shut down in the event of a more severe outbreak in the fall? We need to have a solid plan going into this. If COVID is detected what are the measures used to help contain an outbreak? Close a building or campus?

• Are there parameters in place which will indicate when/if UConn needs to close again? There is at times a level of mistrust between the university and the community. Increased transparency would be helpful.

• RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Share detailed plans about what will happen at UConn and in Mansfield if an outbreak occurs, including what constitutes an outbreak and what specific actions will be taken by both parties.

In Favor of Reopening

• The action plan UConn has, in all honesty I feel as though UConn has a thorough and precise plan. UConn is taking as many steps as deemed possible to limit the risk.

• UConn needs to open. We can’t just keep everything closed. We know who is at risk, and they need to take responsibility to keep safe. We need to respect UConn’s needs.

• UConn has presented a complete plan which focuses on the safety of their students and the residents of Mansfield.

• It’s important for UConn to “open.” Students need a good learning experience and to the degree possible, the social experience “typical” of college.

• But what alternative is there at this point in time, but to try? Maybe it will work. Or maybe many more people will get sick and die.

Financial Considerations

• As year round residents of Mansfield we are concerned with the number of students coming back from all over and infiltrating our community at this time. Education can be postponed, lives and health of our community are more important. We are not dismissing financial concerns, but again, lives over $$$.

• The University is more concerned with the bottom line than student/local safety. "Can't" have a remote semester? "Can't" afford it? Those are subjective assertions. Better safe and through this than determined to open with risk.

• Concerned that the focus is NOT on safety but on money, satisfying parents of students. The community feels left out of the discussion.

• My understanding is that safety is keeping communities of people together. Connecticut has done a reasonable job doing this. Why are most local students being refused housing in preference to out of state students. The goal is $ not safety.
• **UConn cares about $, not the community. It’s all about the $. They need out of state and country students to reside in Storrs. They pay a lot of more money than local kids.**

• **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Share information about the factors considered in the reopening plans and the various committees that informed the decision process.

**Campus Questions**

• *Opening the Student Union would be a mistake. I understand the university wants to lower the number of students on campus, but if locations where large gatherings occur are opened, it’s useless.*

• *Opening the rec center back up is a terrible idea! Gyms are high risk areas.*

• *How will shared spaces (desks, chairs, etc.) be disinfected between uses? Are the students responsible for cleaning the classrooms? Faculty? Who will train about cleaning practices? What solutions will be used? What PPE is provided to protect people from the cleaning product chemicals?*

• *Cancel athletics for the fall and clubs are virtual only until mid-September? How are these choices prioritizing safety and reinforcing that this ISNT business as usual.*

• *How will buses operate and be sanitized?*

• **RECOMMENDATIONS:** (1) Provide updated information to Mansfield about campus operations (i.e., what’s open at what capacity?); (2) Share information about cleaning practices on campus with residents; and (3) Provide information about bus operating and cleaning schedules.