VCUarts Qatar
Fall 2021 Return to Campus Plan
Introduction/Scope

VCUarts Qatar recognizes the importance of protecting the health and safety of its community while maintaining its academic mission and physical presence within the VCUarts Qatar building. This is particularly true because the situation surrounding COVID-19 continues to develop and the future of the pandemic remains unclear.

As public health guidance, government restrictions, and clinical best practices change, VCUarts Qatar also understands the need for flexibility as a method of success in addressing the evolving and uncertain situation.

This document outlines the approach that VCUarts Qatar will continue to implement as it endeavors to reduce the risk of contracting and spreading the COVID-19 virus in the building. This is essential, given that varying forms of restrictions and limitations in activities will be in place for the near future, and in order to be prepared for the possibility of a resurgence of infections that will in all likelihood result in new restrictive measures being put in place.

Key Objectives

The objective is to align, as much as possible, VCUarts Qatar’s Return to Campus Plan with the plans of Qatar Foundation (QF), Qatar’s Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), other Education City Partner Universities (EC PUs), and where appropriate, home campus. The key objectives are as follows:

- To minimize the risk of COVID-19 to the community through the implementation of policies and guidelines set by the MoPH in cooperation with QF and EC PUs;
- To ensure close coordination and communication between members of VCUarts Qatar’s Crisis Management Team (CMT), academic and administrative departments, the school’s leadership, and home campus;
- To facilitate a phased reopening in alignment with maximum building capacity and classroom/office occupancy requirements as set by the MoPH that continue to support research, teaching, and service.

The resumption of on-campus activities under these guidelines does not imply a return to “business as usual.” Employees have returned to the building as their primary place of work. However, to align university operations with VCU Richmond Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs), up to 40% of working hours per week are allowed to be completed remotely for non-student facing positions pending approval of the direct supervisor.

Students will receive in-person instruction for the majority of classes with set building access hours described in detail below. This document deals specifically with the approach for a wider return to campus than the previous semester and will be updated as required.
Crisis Management Team

VCUarts Qatar established a Crisis Management Team (CMT) in the Spring of 2019 to address and develop plans and courses of action in response to safety issues, for the well-being of its community, and in support of the continuation of its academic mission. With the recent developments surrounding COVID-19, the CMT has developed a comprehensive plan to safely and sustainably open the VCUarts Qatar building, to allow the return of employees and students, and to carry out normal operations.

The guiding principles in helping the CMT formulate the plan are as follows:

- Safety and well-being of students, faculty, staff, and contract workers
- Minimize the transmission of the virus among the community
- Maintain a healthy learning and work environment
- Continue the academic mission

The CMT members assigned to addressing VCUarts Qatar’s Return to Work plans are:

- Amir Berbić, Dean
- Kathryn London-Penny, Associate Dean for Administration, Director of Communications
- Mohamed C Amor, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
- Diane Derr, Associate Dean for Research and Development
- Greet Provoost, Assistant Dean for Enrollment and Registration Services
- Katherine Wildman, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs
- Lejla Nikšić, Director of Strategic Engagement
- Mirza Baig, Chief Technology Officer
- Zeyad Bateiha, Director of Academic and Career Advising
- Omer Javed, Director of Finance
- Archana Kumar, Interim Director of Human Resources
- Andrea Cecetka, Deputy Safety Officer
- Dana Rohani, Deputy Director Facilities
- Isabelle St-Louis, Manager of Exhibitions and Lectures
- Amy Andres, Director of Libraries
- Christopher Buchakjian, Digital Fabrication Lab & Woodshop Coordinator
- Caroline Kariuki-Ochieng, Executive Administrator for the Dean
- Jovita Pereira, Guest Relations Specialist

Health and Safety

Qatar Government Requirements

The MoPH published the COVID-19 Qatar National Response Action Plan (2020) which outlines the response to the pandemic in the country. The document also identifies clear action plans for the well-being of the public and considers the
required actions necessary to prepare, monitor, respond to, and recover from, any outbreak.

As further documentation related to the phasing of a return to work/study is published by the MoPH or other government entities in Qatar, they will be incorporated into VCUarts Qatar’s plans when appropriate, to comply with local laws and regulations. As a result, VCUarts Qatar’s community will need to remain flexible, as building operations may change.

**VCUarts Qatar Return to Campus Risk Assessment**

A risk assessment was conducted by VCUarts Qatar to comply with the MoPH’s Precautions Guidelines for Lifting of COVID-19. The assessment identifies risks that will be faced by VCUarts Qatar’s community upon its return to campus, and the engineering/administrative controls which have been implemented to reduce those risks. The information provided in the risk assessment also meets many of the requirements listed in Appendix 3 of QF’s Return to Work Guidance Framework document. This document is available for review upon request.

**A Phased Approach to Reoccupying the Building**

Qatar’s government is reopening various sectors within the country in a phased approach. While estimated dates by the MoPH have been announced, they are subject to change depending on the course of the pandemic. VCUarts Qatar will support any reopening guidance issued by Qatar’s government and will follow any percentage occupancy mandates outlined by the MoPH and QF. On July 30, 2021, Qatar extended Phase 3 of its planned reopening.

As on-site activity increases and operations expand, VCUarts Qatar, along with other EC PUs and QF, will closely monitor and assess the situation on the Education City campus, including the course of the virus locally and the effectiveness of VCUarts Qatar’s policies and procedures to mitigate it. Tighter restrictions and reduced staffing may need to be implemented if localized outbreaks occur.

**Building Access Protocols**

In accordance with MoPH guidelines, employees/students/visitors are required to show their vaccination status through their EHTERAZ app or a rapid antigen test completed in the last seven days to the security guards at the main entrance, as well as to have their temperature taken prior to entry into the building. In June of 2020, the MoPH published Precautions Guidelines for Lifting of COVID-19 Restrictions- Phase 1, which denies entry to a building if a person has a temperature above 38 degrees Celsius, or if the EHTERAZ app indicates Yellow, Grey, or Red; these rules continue in the current phase of reopening. VCUarts Qatar’s community will also be required to either swipe their university issued ID on a card reader, or sign-into the building using their own pen, and to wear a face
covering while in the building unless in a private office with the door closed or seated and socially distanced when consuming food/beverages. Traffic flow measures are in place throughout the building as well as furniture arrangements in studios, classrooms, and the Cafeteria which support social distancing requirements. As of July 5, 2020, the doors adjacent to the Library which lead to the parking lot have been the main exit point; this also remains in place for the Fall 2021 semester. The exit adjacent to the Library will reduce congestion at the main entrance and allow for social distancing measures. Should an emergency arise, such as a fire, all building doors will unlock automatically, and the building will be vacated immediately. While entry to the building may be a lengthy process, it will enable VCUArts Qatar to provide detailed records of all who enter the building, and will assist with contact tracing should it become necessary. As restrictions are gradually lifted, the building access process will be modified accordingly.

**Compliance and Safety Enforcement**

The role of the Safety Officer, as mandated in the MoPH Precautions Guidelines for Lifting of COVID-19 Restrictions, is to monitor, reinforce, and report compliance with the precautions set by the MoPH. This position will be held by a member of the Facilities & Safety department. In the event the Safety Officer is unable to be present in the building, the role of Safety Officer will be held by the Lead Guard assigned to VCUArts Qatar from the contracted QF Security team as this position is covered beyond normal business hours.

The MoPH guidelines for school operations also emphasize the importance of school leadership and the school community in reinforcing compliance with precautions. The Dean has emphasized adhering to the guidelines set forth by the government of Qatar and continues to communicate his support of Qatar’s state mandates.

If a member of the VCUArts Qatar community approaches someone in the VCUArts Qatar building to remind them of a precaution in place that they are neglecting to follow (mask wearing in public, eating/drinking while seated and socially distanced, etc) this should be seen as assisting a community member in support of a safe environment for all. If the guidance is not followed or the community member is not comfortable approaching the individual, non-compliance can be reported to Human Resources (for employees) or Student Affairs (for students). Both Human Resources and Student Affairs have processes in place to deal with community members who violate university policies and procedures; this includes non-compliance with the COVID safety protocols detailed in this document.

Any member of the VCUArts Qatar community, whether they are a student, faculty, staff or visitor, who continues to disregard Qatar law and Human Resources or Student Affairs interventions may be denied future building access. Should the issue escalate, QF Security will notify their supervisors and dial 16000 to involve Qatar law enforcement.
Social Distancing/Traffic Flow

VCUarts Qatar applies the 1.5-meter (physical distancing rule) to determine room capacity in each space at VCUarts Qatar, as articulated in the latest MoPH Precautions Guidelines for Lifting of COVID-19 Restrictions document (Phase 3) and guidance from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and QF. Room capacity in each space at VCUarts Qatar will be clearly identified on door signage for ease of recognition. Within each classroom, studio, office, room, facility and the Cafeteria, designated seating will be marked with green circles to indicate which spaces are available for use. The furniture configuration in each space ensures that social distancing guidelines are met; re-arrangement of furniture is prohibited as this may interfere with social distancing guidelines. Social distancing guidelines should also be respected in common spaces such as hallways, elevators, student lounges, common areas, break rooms, restrooms, and prayer rooms.

High traffic flow areas in the VCUarts Qatar building can be identified and navigated by using the appropriate color-coded signage on the walls, stairs, and floors. Video display terminals at various locations throughout the buildings also display health and safety reminders and information.

Infection Prevention and Control

Disinfection wipes, sprays, and hand sanitizers are available throughout the VCUarts Qatar building for use by its community.

Greater care and attention to detail will be given to common touch areas throughout the building by QF-contracted cleaning staff to include handrails, elevators, break rooms, washrooms, and prayer rooms. Deep cleaning operations will occur more frequently by the QF-contracted cleaning staff in high-traffic areas and during nights and weekends.

If specific disinfectants are required for operations within a department, the Facilities & Safety department will provide consultation support as necessary. Signage has been installed in coordination with the Communications department throughout the building to assist with identifying infection control requirements.

Face Coverings

Face coverings must be worn while in all public spaces within the building, and may only be removed when alone in private offices and when seated while eating/drinking where social distancing can be practiced. Community members may use their own cloth face coverings, including single-use surgical masks. The same cloth face coverings cannot be worn on repeated days unless they have been properly hand-washed or laundered beforehand for use on the following day. Face coverings may vary, however they should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Be secured with either ties or ear loops
- Cover the nose and mouth
- Allow for breathing without restrictions
- Be able to be laundered without damage or change to shape.

**Care and Use of Face Coverings**

*When putting on a face covering/disposable mask:*
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer prior to handling the face covering/disposable mask
- Tie the straps behind the head and neck or loop around the ears.

*When taking off a face covering/disposable mask:*
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Loop your finger into the strap and pull the strap away from the ear, or untie the straps
- Wash your hands immediately after removing the face covering/mask.

*Throughout the process:*
- Avoid touching the front of the face covering/disposable mask. Try to avoid adjusting the mask during the day and wash your hands/use sanitizer after any adjustments
- Cloth face coverings should be replaced immediately if soiled, damaged (e.g. ripped, punctured), or visibly contaminated
- Disposable masks must not be used for more than one day and should be placed in the trash after your shift or if they are soiled or damaged (e.g., stretched ear loops, torn or punctured material), or visibly contaminated.

**Eating and Drinking in the Building**

As more time is spent in the VCUarts Qatar building, food and beverage areas, such as the Cafeteria, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, breakrooms, and faculty and staff canteens, etc have reopened. Eating and drinking requires the removal of face coverings. Therefore, it is important that community members follow the MoPH guidelines in the Precautions Guidelines for lifting of Lifting COVID-19 Restrictions.

To avoid affecting the physical distancing parameters or table occupancy rates in the Cafeteria, the re-arrangement of furniture is prohibited as this may interfere with social distancing guidelines.

In addition, food and beverages brought into the building from deliveries or from home should not be shared among community members (i.e. pizza/donuts, etc. for an office or studio to share) as buffet-style eating is not allowed. These activities discourage social distancing and may lead to an environment which reduces the likelihood of proper face coverings being worn in the building.
Community members are expected to refrain from walking while eating/drinking within the building. Outside of the Cafeteria, items may be consumed, while seated, in private offices or in socially distanced studio spaces and classrooms. Food and beverages should be consumed in a reasonable timeframe and face coverings should be re-applied. All trash should be disposed of properly.

**COVID-19 Symptoms or Positive Case Identified at VCUarts Qatar**

In the event that a member of the community falls ill or exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 while at the VCUarts Qatar building and is not well enough to drive home, they should immediately isolate themselves in the nearest available location and notify the VCUarts Qatar Control Room at 4402-0769 of their location in the building. QF Security will make the necessary notifications to the MoPH for the individual by dialing 16000 and notifying a member of the Facilities & Safety department.

If a COVID-19 positive case has been officially identified to the VCUarts Qatar Facilities & Safety department through either Human Resources, Student Affairs, or other official notification, the Facilities & Safety department will cooperate with the MoPH and QF to assist with contact tracing and disinfection protocols.

QF’s Safety Directorate and Health Clinic will work in collaboration with the QF CMT, MoPH and each entity on the Education City campus as building populations may overlap (cross-registered students, dorms, etc.). Communication from QF may be sent through to the EC PUs in three distinct manners:

- Through the QF CMT universities focal point(s), which liaise with the university deans and relay messages directly to be disseminated through each of the EC PU’s CMTs;
- Using the QF PU Crisis Comms WhatsApp group; and
- Sent via the HVAP group email address to be shared via the EC PU focal points.

In conjunction with VCUarts Qatar’s Dean’s Office, the Communications department will manage any messages to the community regarding positive cases.

**Return to Campus Training**

Virtual return to campus training was developed by the department of Human Resources at VCU in Richmond and was required for all VCU employees, including those at VCUarts Qatar, before returning to work on campus for the Fall 2020 semester.

Central to the training is an understanding that some members of VCUarts Qatar’s community face greater risks from COVID-19 than others. VCUarts Qatar has identified the processes that are available for employees and students to seek accommodations or adjustments as warranted by their individual circumstances.
Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

The university recognizes that the situation with COVID-19 may be stressful for members of VCUarts Qatar’s community, especially those with family and friends who are affected. The Health and Medical section on VCUarts Qatar’s intranet contains information on the Employee Wellbeing Program. During the remote work phase, various webinars were conducted to address factors affecting employee wellbeing and additional counseling sessions were provided to assist employees and their families dealing with difficulties during this pandemic.

Students should continue to seek assistance through Personal Development and Counseling Services within the Student Affairs department.

Academic and Administrative Plans

Academic

Fall semester 2021 academic instruction began on August 22. While the first two weeks will be based on an online mode of instruction (August 22—September 2), the remainder of the semester will be based on the in-person modality of instruction (September 5—December 9). During the first two weeks, students may access the VCUarts Qatar building from 7:00 am – 9:00 pm.

Starting on September 5, 2021, classes will be held in the in-person/in-classroom modality, with a handful of exceptions. Those exceptions include a few lecture courses offered in “online zoom/synchronous”- and a few in “online/asynchronous”- modality. All academic personnel are provided with operational guidelines and accommodation-options to ensure compliance with safety measures. All instructional and operational plans support the mission of the university while prioritizing the health and safety of students and employees alike. Reminders will be sent to faculty, students, and staff regarding updated policies and/or behavioral expectations.

The VCUarts Qatar FabLab, PrintLab, WoodShop, and FlexLab will operate in accordance with the university’s Return to Campus Plan and the directives of QF and the MoPH. These facilities will be open to faculty, staff and students by appointment. Reservations for laser cutting, vinyl cutting, and working in the Woodshop must be made through the FabLab online booking system. A "Service Bureau" option will remain available for all 3D printing and wide format inkjet printing. Walk-in and online consultations are available. All printgrids throughout the building will be back online. For more information please visit the FabLab website.

Recruitment and admissions continue to be a priority for the university. Using social media, high school counselors, the VCUarts Qatar website, and new delivery platforms, such as electronic acceptance letters and virtual meetings with applicants and prospective students, VCUarts Qatar continues to recruit and meet virtually, or in person, with prospective students and families by appointment. VCUarts Qatar is working on a plan with other Education City Partner Universities to develop an effective unified recruitment plan using virtual platforms.
Supporting students during these challenging times and uncovering new and innovative facets of the student experience has been a critical priority for the university. To facilitate a smooth transition to the in-person mode of operation, VCUarts Qatar will continue to use online tools as well as a presence on social media.

**Administrative**

As VCUarts Qatar prepares for a 100% campus presence in Fall 2021 while following MoPH guidelines, the intent is to also offer a certain degree of flexibility through Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) to eligible employees. FWAs allow up to 40% of work to be completed at home, or potentially more in some special cases if the employee’s role is suitable for this type of work arrangement. The arrangements must be made in conjunction with supervisors who will determine the appropriateness to the role and other factors that impact department operations, before approving the request. Dean Berbić’s approval may be required in some cases.

This option will be available on a 90-day pilot basis for eligible staff on campus, which will be tentatively rolled out on September 5. VCUarts Qatar is still working on ensuring that managers and supervisors receive sufficient training and guidance before eligible employees can request FWAs through their supervisors. Once the 90-day pilot is rolled out on September 5, eligible employees will need to discuss FWAs with their supervisors, before executing the FWA agreement via Docusign.

Until then, supervisors are asked to provide some degree of flexibility to their team members as they return to campus, if team members have extenuating circumstances that prevent them from returning to a 100% campus presence immediately.

**Library/Gallery/Bookstore/IT**

The VCUarts Qatar Art and Design Library and the Materials Library operate in accordance with the university’s Return to Campus plan and the directives of QF and the MoPH. Both libraries will be accessible to students, faculty, and staff. Beginning September 5, the Art and Design Library will be open from 9am-5pm; the Materials Library will be open from 10am-5pm. Students, staff, and faculty may also request books from the Art and Design Library. From August 23 to September 4, requested items may be picked up from the building’s main Security Desk. From September 5 requested books may be picked up from the Art and Design Library’s information desk. Books may be returned to the portable book drop located just inside the building’s main doors or, during hours of operation, to the Art and Design Library.

The online collections of the VCUarts Qatar Art and Design Library remain available to students and faculty 24/7 and may be accessed through the library’s discovery platform.
Students and faculty may also schedule a virtual consultation with librarians and materials curators. Librarians and curators are available to join classes in-person, or online, for instruction and workshops.

The Innovative Media Studios can be booked online. The Studios will also offer limited hours for walk-up equipment checkouts. The Fall semester hours are pending but will be posted and shared as soon as they become final.

The Writing Center continues to offer online appointments. Appointments can be booked online through the Writing Center’s online booking calendar.

VCUarts Qatar’s Gallery operates in accordance with the university’s Return to Campus plan and the directives of QF and the MoPH while also serving VCUarts Qatar’s community needs. VCUarts Qatar is planning to host exhibitions in the Gallery and the Project Spaces (Saffron Hall, Glass display cases located on the ground floor and first floor, and in the exhibition space at the Art and Design Library) at the beginning of the Fall semester. Exhibitions will be open to the public and will include works produced by visiting artists. However, visitors should respect attendance capacity by recognizing building capacity and social distancing guidelines.

The VCUarts Qatar Bookstore operates in accordance with the university’s Return to Campus plan and the directives of QF and the MoPH while also serving the VCUarts Qatar’s community needs. The Bookstore is promoting its online services to help reduce face-to-face interaction. The Bookstore website can be found at this link. Faculty, students, and staff can purchase art supplies, books, and other related merchandise without physically going to the store. Customers will be informed once their items are available for collection and orders will be available for pick-up at specific times. Contactless protocols for purchase transactions will be established. For walk-in buyers, a more stringent regulation on social distancing and mask-wearing is mandated.

The Technology Services department operates to provide support to the VCUarts Qatar community. Should a member of faculty, staff, or the student body require IT support, this should be coordinated by contacting the IT Helpdesk on +974 4402 0575 or at vcuqithelp@vcu.edu.

**Communication**

As in any crisis, clear communication to the community is key to successful response and recovery operations. All communications regarding health and safety policies continue to be approved by the Dean and forwarded to the Director of Communications for final review prior to release. They are then conveyed to VCU Arts Qatar’s community primarily through the VCUQ Alert email and the https://qatar.vcu.edu/index.php/?/coronavirus-updates page. The community will be notified of policy changes in a timely manner, along with home campus.
Sustainability and Adaptability

Sustainability

VCUarts Qatar strives to incorporate sustainability into every initiative. Reusable hand sanitizer bottles have been placed around the building which can be refilled in the Facilities & Safety department, reducing plastic waste. A limited supply of cloth face coverings is also still available upon request at the Facilities & Safety department.

Maintaining an Inclusive Community

VCUarts Qatar is committed to maintaining an environment that is free of all forms of discrimination. Each institution must seek to foster mutual respect, support, and inclusion for every member of the community to thrive, especially as the university continues to navigate life and university operations during a global pandemic.

During this public health event, where there are many unknowns, taking care of each other is just as important as taking care of ourselves. Making assumptions about or engaging in negative treatment of others based on perceived symptoms, medical conditions or abilities, national origin, racial and ethnic characteristics, or any other protected status negatively impacts the community. Every person’s care, compassion, and empathy for each other makes a positive difference.

Conclusion

VCUarts Qatar acknowledges and accepts its responsibility in ensuring the health and safety of its community while maintaining the academic mission. While the future of the pandemic remains unclear, VCUarts Qatar maintains a positive approach and continues to develop and implement new strategies and techniques that allow faculty and students to continue to thrive academically as well as answer the tough questions in an ever-changing environment. With the support of QF and guidance of the MoPH, VCUarts Qatar will continue to follow public health and safety guidance, government restrictions, and other restrictions and limitations as it endeavors to reduce the risk of contracting and spreading the COVID-19 virus in the building.

References


-Qatar Foundation, (June, 2020) QF Return to Work Guidance Framework