

From physical to virtual location

[Unity College in Maine](#), which frames itself as "America's Environmental College," has opened up debate about whether small institutions really need to have flagship campuses to survive.

In a recently updated FAQ, college leaders wrote that for the time being, the school planned to "continue to offer face-to-face, experiential, environmentally-focused programs" on its 240-acre campus — once the campus reopens. At the same time, they noted, "If it is no longer financially viable, the college leadership has the ability to explore selling the main campus or any other college assets ... in order to ensure resources are allocated to best serve our students, their needs and the long-term sustainability of the college."

Unity, a private nonprofit liberal arts college, is on the small side with just under 1,300 students. However, enrolment rose after the school announced the "Path Forward," which shifted the college away from its traditional two-semester model, to a new calendar featuring eight five-week terms, enabling prospective students to apply to at any point throughout the year, with distance and hybrid classes.

Last September, for example, the institution announced its "largest incoming undergraduate class ever" — 296 new students — a 130 percent increase in distance education students. The change in format was made in response to a 33 percent decline in enrolment for the traditional format and a projected loss of \$12 million to \$14 million in the 2020-2021 academic year.

As the board of trustees explained in a letter to the campus community, "Once, the campus on Quaker Hill Road was our classroom, then Maine became our classroom. Now, our classroom is any location where a Unity College student is learning. As with schools across the country, we are considering the opportunities that presents."

Currently, all courses are being delivered online. The use of the hybrid learning approach is being considered for fall 2021, depending on pandemic conditions.