

CASE STUDY

HOW APOGEE AND PACE UNIVERSITY CREATED #OURSAFEPACE

With COVID-19 slamming New York City in the first wave of the pandemic in Spring 2020, Pace University had to send all students home and move all classes online. As the fall approached, the university had to determine whether and how to safely bring students back or to implement a fully virtual semester.

Throughout the summer the university developed protocols for bringing students back to campus as well as a communication plan to ensure that the community was well informed, including regulations for resident students, hybrid classes, a university COVID dashboard, and color-coded campus alert levels to be updated daily. For Fall 2020, Pace mandated mask-wearing and social distancing requirements for students while still striving to provide the most “normal” college experience possible for Pace undergraduates.



Pace has partnered with Apogee for [Campus Engagement Services](#), which include managed content creation, social media curation, and digital signage support, since 2011. With the advent of COVID-19, Apogee and Pace committed to doubling-down on these efforts to build campus affinity while also reiterating important safety messaging for the Fall 2020 semester. Pace University had four goals at the start of the campaign:

- Keep current students connected with their peers throughout COVID-19
- Encourage students to wear masks, and abide by all safety protocols, at all times on campus
- Drive organic social media conversations among students
- Encourage use of the #OurSafePace hashtag

There were many challenges to overcome. Foremost was New York City's geography, which is densely populated and became one of the major U.S. COVID-19 hotspots early in the pandemic. Another challenge was how to communicate handling of non-compliance with the safety guidelines to students without making them feel surveilled or punished. With pandemic fatigue settling in, Pace leaders were also concerned about retaining students' attention with these campaigns from week to week.

The University Relations department, Enrollment team, and Apogee collaborated on ways to address these challenges and came up with some compelling content and campaign solutions:

- An Apogee-managed #OurSafePace photo and video competition with weekly themes
- Digital signage content for COVID-19 and safety messaging
- Competition themes including "Best Dressed," "Morning Motivation," and "Safe While Studying"
- Apogee-developed webpage and supporting marketing materials for the competition
- Weekly vote counts and updates from the Apogee team to Pace University
- Pace students could submit photos via webpage or hashtag to be curated by Apogee
- Students campaigned by sharing their photos and encouraging peers to vote for them
- Every week, Pace awarded a gift card to the student with the most votes

Student engagement metrics were high, with 58 Pace student photo submissions over six weeks and 67,515 total votes on student photos! Most importantly, in a city that was spiking coronavirus cases, Pace had only ten positive COVID-19 cases in the Fall 2020 semester. The university was also awarded the number four spot in the nation in College Magazine's "[Top 10 Colleges Deserving Recognition for Their Response to COVID-19](#)."

The Pace team felt students enjoyed the different weekly themes and were more connected to campus during this trying time. Apogee also helped the Pace University Relations team free up their time. Jacqueline Tortorella, assistant director of marketing and account management commented, "Our University Relations staff was able to let Apogee manage the contest infrastructure and voting updates so we could focus on strategic communications during this hectic period."