

Date: 2 September 2021

To: University Council Executive Committee

From: Janette R. Hill, Ph.D.
Chair, Faculty Affairs Committee

Re: Proposed COVID-19 Letter for Endorsement by University Council

On behalf of the Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC), I am sending a letter related to COVID-19 concerns to consider sending to the University Council.

The FAC voted unanimously to send this letter to President Morehead and Provost Hu in August 2021 to share faculty concerns with current policies and procedures related to COVID-19. The FAC would like to put this letter forward to the entire University Council to consider endorsing and sending to the administration at UGA.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Date: 18 August 2021

To: Jere W. Morehead, President
S. Jack Hu, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

From: The Faculty Affairs Committee, University Council

Re: COVID-19 and Fall 2021 at The University of Georgia

As elected representatives of the UGA faculty serving on the University Council's Faculty Affairs Committee, we are charged with addressing faculty concerns. There is an outpouring of apprehension related to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in our area and the lack of decisive public health safety measures in the planning and opening of the 2021 Fall Semester at UGA.

Three recent developments are of special concern:

- The fully vaccinated rate in Georgia, the eighth lowest in the country, is below 40%. Clarke County's rate of vaccination is even lower while the rate of infection, due to the delta variant, is growing exponentially. Clarke County is among the top 20% most vulnerable counties in the Pandemic Vulnerability Index as reported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (<https://covid19pvi.niehs.nih.gov/>).
- Masking in public indoor areas is recommended by the CDC, whether vaccinated or not vaccinated, in areas of substantial or high transmission of COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>). Almost all counties in Georgia and its neighboring states have a high rate of transmission as defined by the CDC. Further, Athens-Clarke County (ACC) passed a mask mandate, the ACC School Board also passed a mask mandate for teachers, staff, and students regardless of their vaccination status, and several SEC schools have implemented mask mandates (e.g., Alabama, Auburn, Ole Miss).
- The area hospital capacity continues to diminish, with times when ICU and Emergency services have to be diverted due to reaching admission limits/bed availability (see <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report> and <https://georgiarcc.org/>).

Based on these concerns, and in the interest of the safety of our campus, we urge you to work with the Governor and the Board of Regents to implement the following common-sense safety measures:

- Mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for all faculty, staff, and students who are medically able to do so and who do not have a religious exemption. This should occur immediately or immediately after the vaccines are fully approved by the FDA. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett recently refused to block a unanimous lower court decision—in the Seventh Circuit—that permitted a state university to mandate COVID-19 vaccination. Given the current pandemic, mandated vaccination aligns with the BOR policy that permits immunizations in exceptional circumstances
- Mandate that everyone wear a mask when indoors per CDC guidelines. Exceptions should be made for those with documented medical conditions preventing a mask/face covering.
- Mandate randomized large-scale testing of faculty, staff, and students to enable the identification and isolation of those with COVID-19.

We respectfully request that you address these concerns as quickly as possible so that changes can be implemented as we begin the 2021 Fall Semester. We are willing and happy to help the President in any way we can to lobby the Governor and Board of Regents to change current policies to protect the health and safety of the University of Georgia community and the safety of the larger Athens community.