

The following message is being sent to all Academic Senate Members, Academic Assistant Deans, and Academic Department Managers.

## UC SANTA BARBARA

# Academic Senate

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August 20, 2021

### Divisional Chair's Newsletter

Dear Colleagues,

As we approach the start of fall quarter and a new academic year, I am writing with the first of several updates on campus instructional planning. I realize the COVID-19 situation with the Delta variant looks very different today than it did just a few weeks ago. This is understandably causing a lot of concern among Senate faculty. I aim to inform you about what has been happening in the campus' COVID-19 task force discussions, how and when decisions about instruction and related issues are being made, and where to find important information. I plan to send updates approximately weekly as we approach fall quarter. *If you have questions you would like to see addressed, please send them to [shasta@ucsb.edu](mailto:shasta@ucsb.edu) with "COVID Q&A" in the subject line.* Many people have similar questions, so answers may be grouped rather than individual. The Q&A will be archived weekly on the [Senate's COVID-19 webpage](#). Please keep in mind that the parameters are changing frequently, so campus recommendations and decisions will necessarily change too - the information I send to you today may be revised or updated before fall quarter starts.

**Working on campus.** Several thousand faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students have been working (and, in some cases, living) on campus continuously since last year. Although the vast majority of these people are now vaccinated, there have been a few dozen "breakthrough" infections in the last few weeks. However, vaccination

remains broadly effective at preventing serious illness: as far as we know, the infections have not resulted in any cases of hospitalization so far. We still have had no cases of on-campus transmission. Nevertheless, the campus [reinstated](#) a universal indoor mask mandate after the CDC reported indirect evidence of transmission by vaccinated individuals infected with the Delta variant recently. The only exception to the indoor mask requirement is for people working in private, single-occupancy offices with independent ventilation. Masks are not currently required outdoors, except for unvaccinated individuals in close contact (< 6 feet) with others. Currently, there is no requirement for the type of mask to use, but the CDC [advises](#) that close-fitting, multilayer masks are preferred.

**Vaccination status update.** The systemwide vaccine mandate has a compliance deadline of September 9 (two weeks prior to the start of classes on our campus). UCOP has set a target of [90% vaccination](#) to allow for reopening as a “fully vaccinated” campus. The number of exemptions (medical and religious) from the mandate that have been requested to-date is small - less than 1% of the entire campus community. If you have yet to upload your proof of vaccination to the Student Health Services [patient portal](#), or intend to request a [deferral or exemption](#), please do so **as soon as possible**. If you received your vaccination at Student Health, no additional action is needed on your part.

The majority of our students and employees have already complied with the vaccine mandate, and we expect more to do so before the deadline. As of this writing, over 90% of our in-state students registered for fall quarter are either fully vaccinated, or have started the process of becoming fully vaccinated. The data on out-of-state students are less complete, in part because their vaccine information is not automatically entered from CA databases. In addition, some international students do not have access to US vaccines. Student Health Services is ready to vaccinate them upon arrival in Santa Barbara. Student Affairs will be notifying students who have not yet submitted evidence of vaccination or requested an exemption that their registration will be blocked on September 7, before the start of Pass 2. **Those who are still not in compliance by the start of fall quarter will not be allowed to attend classes or use campus facilities.** All students and employees who are authorized to access the campus without being

fully vaccinated (e.g., those with deferrals for pregnancy or approved exemptions, or those whose vaccination is underway but not complete) will be required to undergo weekly testing. Fully vaccinated individuals will be tested less frequently as part of a “surveillance testing” program to alert the campus early about potential outbreaks.

**In-person instruction.** All ten UC campuses are currently planning a return to mostly in-person instruction in fall (Berkeley and Merced, which are on the semester system, have started to move students in and classes will begin imminently; all other campuses start in late September). These plans were made several months ago, when COVID vaccines first became widely available to all adults. The Senate premised our return to in-person instruction on a vaccine mandate for all campus community members, with a very high rate of compliance and robust enforcement/verification mechanisms. The current estimates of vaccine efficacy, case rates in our county, and modeling studies provided by medical experts on our campus COVID-19 task force reveal that the combination of a very high vaccination rate and universal mask-wearing make the risk of transmission far lower on campus relative to the broader community, where the rate of vaccination is lower (including the K-12 schools our children attend). This is the case regardless of class size. Critically, universal indoor masking plays an essential role in this risk reduction on campus. State and local public health orders limiting room capacity and requiring distancing are no longer in effect, now that the mode of virus transmission is better understood. Current information on Campus Mitigation Protocols is available [here](#).

Most of our students are very eager to return to in-person learning and a more normal campus life. The past 18 months of remote learning have taken a serious toll on their overall mental health, sometimes with tragic consequences. In a sense, educators at all levels are the essential workers in the next phase of this pandemic and its aftermath. Our good fortune in working at a top university comes with a collective responsibility to ensure that the educational needs of our students are met.

**Contingency plans.** The COVID-19 Working Group, which meets most weekday mornings, is closely monitoring COVID-19 infection rates on our campus and in the County of Santa Barbara. The [County dashboard](#) is

updated daily; the daily case rate is about 20 per 100,000 residents and the test positivity rate is 8.6% (compared to 1.4% on campus, according to the [UCSB dashboard](#)). Campus officials will be watching carefully to see whether and how the repopulation of the campus next month will change the parameters, as well as the overall public health conditions at the beginning of the quarter. Unless an instructor has an approved medical exemption from the [Workplace Accommodation Specialist](#), in-person instruction is still the default at this time, and neither instructors nor administrators have the authority to alter the mode of instruction for any instructor, course, or program without the express consent of the Academic Senate. The current Senate guidelines for fall instruction can be found [here](#). At the same time, instructors should encourage students who feel ill not to attend classes, by affording them flexibility in terms of classwork, exams, and deadlines. The Senate is also working on more detailed guidance for fall quarter that will include recommendations for a variety of contingencies. I expect to have an update for you in the next week or so. Please feel free to share this message with your department's graduate students, particularly those who will be serving as instructors and/or TAs in the fall.

**Town hall meeting on fall reopening.** The Senate is organizing a Town Hall meeting on September 13, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. You can expect to hear presentations and updates from Senate leadership, campus administrators, and medical experts, and a Q&A session with a panel of instructors. The meeting will be held virtually to allow maximum participation regardless of where you are spending the last few weeks of summer, and will be recorded for those unable to attend. An agenda, instructions on how to join the meeting, and a place to send your questions, will be emailed to all instructors closer to the date.

**Housing needs.** An unexpected consequence of the pandemic is a local housing shortage that is more severe than usual. More people are working remotely from Santa Barbara, and students in the community are choosing to live with fewer roommates this year. University student housing is very full, even as it has maximized the number of triple rooms to try to create space and fulfill a promise of on-campus housing to both first and second year students who have never studied here in person. Some new graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are also experiencing difficulty finding housing. If you have a spare room in your home, you may consider renting it to one of our students. For more

information or to post a listing, please contact [University and Community Housing Services](#). We encourage you to share this opportunity with your personal networks.

I wish you well in these remaining weeks of summer, and promise to send more information soon.

Sincerely,

Susannah Scott

Academic Senate Divisional Chair, UC Santa Barbara



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