Divisional Chair’s Newsletter

February 7, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

This newsletter contains information about our recent return to in-person instruction and related campus COVID-19 mitigation protocols, a brief look ahead to spring quarter, and a few recent news items of interest to faculty.

**Local pandemic data and projections.** The [Santa Barbara County Community data dashboard](https://sbcounty.data淳.) shows that the number of new COVID-19 cases in all parts of the county has declined very significantly since early January. The changes are most dramatic for the communities in the south County, shown below as a weekly rolling average through the end of January. North County communities tend to have later and broader peaks, while Santa Maria has a double peak (vaccination rates tend to be lower in the north of Santa Barbara County). Hospitalization numbers are also declining locally, with 38 COVID-19 cases in Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital on Friday, compared to 43 one week ago. The very sad reports of recent local deaths from COVID-19 reflect the serious on-going consequences of the pandemic. The County reports them not in real time, but up to several weeks after they occur.
Our campus’ Susceptible-Infected-Recovered-Vaccinated (SIRV) model, developed by Professors Todd Squires (Chemical Engineering) and Scott Grafton (Psychological and Brain Sciences) using local data, shows the past and predicted progression of the Omicron surge, with the peak in cases for our local community occurring around January 7. The modeling further predicts a return to low community transmission rates (similar to fall 2021) in the next week or so. More information about the modeling and the campus COVID-19 medical team’s projections is available here.
The effectiveness of the booster shot in preventing COVID-19 infection and hospitalization is shown clearly in new data from the California Department of Public Health. In January 2022, vaccinated people who had also received a booster shot were 7.5 times less likely to be infected and 14.9 times less likely to be hospitalized, relative to unvaccinated people:

Campus COVID-19 mitigation protocols. The campus testing center has collected 31,193 tests since the beginning of this year. The test positivity rate has declined steadily during winter quarter, from 10.25 % in week 1 to 1.63 % last week. On Saturday, there were 30 students in campus quarantine and isolation housing; another 70 spaces were vacant and available if needed. All classrooms at the Orfalea Childrens’ Center were open last week. There have been no known cases of classroom transmission anywhere on our campus so far in winter quarter.

Due to the rapid decline in case rates, this week (week 6) the campus will return to
regular mandatory testing only for unvaccinated individuals (i.e., those with approved exemptions or deferrals for either the primary series or the booster). The campus will also conduct random early detection screening of students. Please note that eligible individuals who have not received the required booster shot, and who have not applied for an exemption or deferral, by the deadline (Jan 31 for students, Feb 4 for employees) are not considered to be compliant with the UC SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine Policy, and will be required to undergo weekly mandatory campus COVID-19 testing. (After a COVID-19 infection, our system gives a 90-day deferral for required COVID-19 testing and the vaccine booster dose; positive tests obtained outside of campus testing may be reported through the Student Health Patient Portal under “Messages,” then “New Message.”) Failure to comply with either the mandatory testing policy (for those required to do so by campus policy), or with the random early detection screening program (for all students), will result in a loss of access to campus facilities. Other restrictions are under review. Instructors are not required to make alternate arrangements for students who cannot attend class solely because they are not in compliance with university policy. The COVID-19 clearance badge includes a banner indicating the reason for restricted access, e.g., "Isolation", "Quarantine" or "COVID test is overdue." Scheduling a test will remove the banner “COVID test is overdue.”

Return to work after COVID-19 isolation or quarantine. A new rule from California’s Division of Occupational Health and Safety (Cal/OSHA, which regulates workplace safety) requires employees who test positive for COVID-19 to isolate for a full 10 days, unless they receive a negative result from a rapid antigen test after 5 days and have no symptoms. The rule also requires that the test be observed by a supervisor, manager, or their designee. Please note that this “observation” can be done remotely, using Zoom. Rapid antigen COVID-19 test kits are available to departments for this purpose, and will also be offered to anyone with a positive test via an email invitation. When the observer reports a negative test result, the employee’s UCSB COVID-19 Clearance Badge will be cleared within one business day. Cal/OSHA also directs persons who are required to quarantine after a close contact exposure to a COVID-19 case (unvaccinated persons, or persons who are eligible for a booster vaccine but have not yet gotten it) to follow this testing procedure.

The Cal/OSHA rule applies to all faculty and staff, as well as graduate students in their roles as teaching assistants, and undergraduate students in their roles as student employees. It does not apply to students in their student roles (e.g., attending classes), who are nonetheless asked to perform the rapid antigen tests themselves if they wish to shorten their isolation after 5 days. For more information,
New guidelines for sponsored campus events. The campus guideline in effect for January 2022, which recommended that non-class meetings with more than 25 people be held remotely or delayed, has been rescinded. Non-class meetings that, due to their size, are not regulated by the California Department of Public Health (i.e., < 500 attendees indoors, or < 5,000 attendees outdoors, which do not qualify as “mega” events) are allowed on campus at this time. Specific guidance for “mega” events (conferences, concerts, sporting events, etc.) will be forthcoming shortly.

Campus visitors should continue to follow the university’s interim visitors protocol, which requires symptom screening and a self-attestation for COVID-19 vaccination status; recent COVID tests are required for those not fully vaccinated with a booster dose, if eligible. Indoor face masks are still required at all times. For the next 2 weeks, food is discouraged at indoor events, but allowed outdoors. This policy will be re-evaluated after February 17, 2022.

Looking ahead to Spring quarter. In spring, we expect to return to the successful COVID-19 mitigation protocols that allowed our campus to function more normally last fall, and therefore to be able to reinstate instructional policies in effect in fall quarter. The default mode of instruction in spring will be in-person, with limited exceptions for instructors with serious medical conditions and those who live with immunocompromised family members. Instructors who wish to offer an online component to their spring courses may do so under the existing Senate policy that provides this flexibility provided the online component (1) constitutes 50% or less of the contact time on a weekly basis, from the perspective of the enrolled student; (2) is justified for pedagogical reasons, communicated to the department chair, and (3) is disclosed to students as a hybrid course in the Schedule of Classes, prior to the start of the third registration pass time, February 25, 2022.

Town Hall on faculty housing. The Academic Senate will host a town hall meeting on Friday, April 15, from 2:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. The meeting will include presentations by administrators on the university’s plans and timelines for new faculty housing, as well as new information related to faculty housing issues. Faculty will have an opportunity to provide input, express concerns, and ask questions. Please save the date, and look for an email with RSVP information in early April.

New information for faculty with federal student loans. University of California employees may qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. Under this program, borrowers may qualify for forgiveness of the remaining balance
of their Federal Direct Loans after they have made 120 qualifying payments on those loans while employed full time by the University of California. In a new development as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education announced a temporary period during which borrowers may receive credit for payments that previously did not qualify for PSLF under the Temporary Expanded PSLF (TEPSLF). The change in regulations is in effect only until October 31, 2022, and program funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

**New proposed rules on conflict of commitment and outside activities.** UCOP has proposed significant changes to the process for requesting permission for and reporting of outside activities, related to professional activities that involve “foreign-owned” organizations. Specifically, the proposed changes to APM - 025 (Conflict of Commitment and Outside Activities of Faculty Members) would require faculty to request permission from the Chancellor to engage in any Category I or Category II activities involving a foreign-owned or partly foreign-owned organization, and to report these activities annually using the OATS system. The Senate has reviewed the proposal and expressed serious concerns about the potential chilling effect on academic freedom, the loss of international research and collaboration opportunities/impact, and the fostering of xenophobia. You can view the full Senate response [here](#). Individual faculty who have additional concerns are invited to send comments on the proposed revisions to June Betancourt, Director of Academic Personnel, by Friday, February 25.

**Call for Faculty Research Grant proposals.** The Academic Senate is now accepting applications for Faculty Research Grants for the grant period July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. These awards of up to $20,000 support faculty scholarly activities. Priority is given to:

- Early career faculty with a clear need for funding
- Projects for which no extramural funding source can be identified
- Requests for seed monies with high potential for impact or graduation to extramural funding;
- Requests that extend/augment work currently supported by extramural funds, particularly to prepare extramural renewal proposals.

The firm deadline to submit a proposal is 11:59 p.m. on March 27, 2022. Award notifications will be released by June 10, 2022. Please review the guidelines, since funding criteria have changed slightly. Past examples of successful proposals are available at [https://senate.ucsb.edu/grants/faculty-research/](https://senate.ucsb.edu/grants/faculty-research/).

**Academic Senate Elections - Call for Nominations.** The Academic Senate is seeking to elect one Academic Senate Divisional Chair (two-year term), three Assembly Representatives to the systemwide Academic Senate (one-year term),
and four members of our local Committees on Committees (two-year term). Terms for all positions begin on September 1, 2022.

The process begins with the Call for Nominations, with a deadline of February 15, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. An email was sent to faculty on January 31 with additional information and a link to the nominations website. The Senate Election will open on February 16, with ballots due March 2, 2022 by 5:00 p.m. I encourage you to participate in the shared governance of our university by nominating and endorsing candidates, and by voting.

I look forward to updating you soon with more news about the rest of our winter quarter, and beyond.

Sincerely,
Susannah Scott
Chair, Santa Barbara Division