

*The following message is being sent to all Senate members, academic assistant deans, academic department managers, and research unit managers.*

## UC SANTA BARBARA

# Academic Senate

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Divisional Chair's Newsletter

March 28, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to Spring Quarter. I am writing to update you on information from the Chancellor's COVID-19 Working Group and other Senate news.

**COVID-19 transmission.** County-wide transmission of COVID-19 remains low, with current levels similar to those seen early last fall. The Santa Barbara County Community Data Dashboard shows the daily new infection rate as of March 18 to be 5.6 cases per 100,000 people (and, in vaccinated residents, the rate is just 3.3 cases per 100,000). Consequently, the CDC classifies Santa Barbara County as a low-risk location for COVID-19 transmission.

On our campus, the number of cases found through the campus testing program declined in the last few weeks of winter quarter to 20 per week (<3 per day). In week 10, the random screening of 1,256 students to assess the prevalence of asymptomatic COVID-19 infections resulted in only one positive case. Based on this information, the probability that anyone on our campus will encounter someone else who is infected on any given day is now extremely low.

The COVID-19 Working Group has also been following the impact of positive cases on students, faculty and staff. In the past year, including the recent Omicron surge which resulted in thousands of infections, there were no cases of serious illness (requiring more than regular medical attention). This is evidence of the effectiveness of the vaccines, for which our campus has almost full compliance (98.5% among our students). Although the vaccines (including the booster) appear to block Omicron infections about 50% of the time, they seem to be almost completely effective in

preventing serious outcomes. In addition, since so many students were infected during the winter and thereby gained additional immunity, the probability that they will be reinfected over the next 3 months is extremely low.

The campus will continue its random screening program in spring quarter to ensure that we have early warning of any need to step up mitigation measures should COVID-19 case numbers change significantly. In addition, all individuals who are not fully vaccinated (including with a booster dose, if eligible) must continue to be tested weekly. The campus testing center remains open for anyone who wishes to [schedule a COVID-19 test](#), and at-home COVID-19 rapid antigen tests are available without charge to faculty, staff and students at the UCEN Bookstore Customer Service Desk and Loma Pelona Testing Center.

**Indoor masking.** Our state and the county public health departments lifted their mask mandates in most indoor locations (except for health care facilities and public transport) as of March 1. These decisions were followed by the lifting of the mask mandate in local K-12 schools on March 12. On our campus, the COVID-19 Working Group modified the masking guidelines to align with county and state public health regulations as of March 19. Masks are no longer required indoors on campus, although they remain strongly recommended. There are several exceptions:

1. classrooms, where masking is required only through the end of the first week of spring quarter (following spring break travel of many instructors and students); after April 4, masking will be strongly recommended
2. Student Health Services, which is a health care facility and is therefore required by county guidelines to continue to require masks for the time being,
3. special public events, such as Arts & Lectures performances, which may continue to require masking.

The COVID-19 Working Group reviewed UC recent modeling on the effectiveness of classroom masking using the current local case rates. The probability of classroom transmission changes very little when just 50% of people in the classroom are masked, compared to when everyone is masked. Our medical team is confident that in the current low-risk environment, wearing a high-quality mask provides strong protection for the wearer against the very small chance that someone in the classroom is infected.

While instructors cannot set their own classroom masking policies different from campus policy and from public health orders, it is reasonable to talk to your students about the CDC and campus recommendations that most everyone continue masking indoors for now, and to set an example by wearing your own mask. Please note the useful “Instructional FAQs Spring 2022” on the [Keep Teaching](#) website. There is

helpful advice for faculty who wish to request students to wear masks in the classroom after the first week of classes, at which point masks will be strongly recommended but not required. We expect that many people will want to continue to wear a mask for some time. The campus will supply surgical-quality or N95 masks to any instructors or students who want them.

**Spring quarter instruction.** The default mode of instruction in spring quarter is in-person, with limited, formal exemptions granted to instructors with serious medical conditions and those who live with immunocompromised family members. All instructors and enrolled students are expected to be in residence and participating in in-person instruction in spring quarter, unless they have been granted an exemption or are on an approved leave. Please note that the exemption from in-person teaching previously granted by the Academic Senate during Winter Quarter for instructors who are caregivers of children under the age of five is no longer in effect. This exemption was based on the challenge of childcare closures during the Omicron surge, and was not related to vaccine eligibility.

Limited online components are allowed by current Academic Senate policy for in-person classes provided they (1) constitute 50% or less of the contact time on a weekly basis, from the perspective of the enrolled student; and (2) are justified for pedagogical reasons, and communicated to the department chair. This type of “hybrid” instruction must be disclosed to students in advance of the start of the quarter.

Dual-mode instruction involves providing students in a class with the option to learn in-person or synchronously online. Dual-mode teaching can create a disincentive for students to attend class in-person, an important part of the UCSB residential learning experience. The systemwide Academic Council of the Senate addressed student calls for universal dual-mode instruction in its [March 24 memo](#). Dual-mode instruction is not allowed in spring quarter (see the recent [instructional memo](#)). Students requesting it for medical reasons should be referred to the DSP Office, which will make an assessment to determine if they are eligible for a formal accommodation, and discuss options with the instructor. Students who are temporarily absent from class due to testing positive for COVID-19 should not be referred to the DSP Office for an accommodation, but instructors should make alternative arrangements for such students, as they would for students with other medical reasons for being absent.

**Classroom recordings.** Instructors are not required to record their lectures. The systemwide Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) affirmed this principle in its

statement of March 2, posted [here](#). However, instructors who would like to make lecture recordings available to students as a study aid can find instructions [here](#).

**DSP-approved accommodations.** Students seeking an accommodation to learn online based on a disability must apply through the DSP office, which will assess the request after receiving the appropriate documentation. If the request is granted, DSP will work individually with instructors to find a suitable accommodation that does not materially alter the nature of the course or increase the instructor's workload significantly. Instructors who encounter challenges in this regard are encouraged to notify the [Senate](#).

**Faculty Legislature news.** At its meeting on March 10, 2022, the Faculty Legislature considered a resolution presented by Prof. Jean Beaman (Sociology) on Defending Academic Freedom to Teach About Race and Gender Justice and Critical Race Theory. The resolution passed, and has been conveyed to the Chancellor and EVC. The full text is available [here](#).

The next meeting of the Faculty Legislature will take place on Thursday, April 21 from 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. All members of the Santa Barbara Division are invited to attend. An email with registration information will be distributed a few days before the event.

**Town hall meeting on faculty housing issues.** 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.

**Call for volunteers.** The role of the Academic Senate in the shared governance of the University depends on the volunteer work of many faculty who serve on Senate councils and committees. At this time, the Committee on Committees (CoC) is seeking volunteers for the 2022-23 Academic Senate term.

To volunteer, please complete the [Senate Service Preference Form](#). The form includes brief descriptions of the councils and committees, their meeting schedules, and the work involved. Please know that while CoC tries hard to match each member's specific interests, it must also create balanced and diverse representation among committee members from various disciplines and schools. Although we may

not find a suitable position for everyone who volunteers, we will make every effort to place you.

Sincerely,  
Susannah Scott  
Chair, Santa Barbara Division



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