



Dear Faculty Colleagues,

The current COVID-19 situation in the Austin area and across the state has understandably created a great deal of concern within our community. I have heard from many faculty members directly about the very real anxiety they are feeling. The emergence of the Delta variant is affecting many aspects of our lives at home and at work. I can assure you that we are following the evolution of COVID-19 very closely and our plans for the fall will respond accordingly. We are making some adjustments that I'll outline in this message, and I will keep you informed as things progress. We are working very hard to put the safety of all members of our community first while we also work to ensure we are providing in-person experiences for students and satisfying the governor's executive order for all state agencies.

### **Reduced Classroom Density and Social Distancing**

Faculty members who are scheduled to teach in-person or hybrid classes during the fall semester have the discretion to conduct the in-person portion at reduced density for the first two weeks of the semester. Due to the broad range of classroom environments, this approach provides faculty members flexibility to make the best decision based on the needs of each individual class and allow for greater social distancing, while maintaining the crucial in-person component of instruction. Please note that all students enrolled in an in-person or hybrid course must have at least one in-person experience per week in each course during this time.

A cohort approach may work for many classes, as outlined in the following scenario. Consider a faculty member who is teaching a course that is scheduled to meet in-person three times a week. The faculty member may divide the class into three cohorts of students and meet in person with each cohort once a week. The faculty member could record the first two weeks of lecture material and share those on-line with all the students. The in-person sessions could then be used to review material from prerequisite courses, or simply help the students understand the importance of the course material.

Faculty members also have the option of asking students not to sit in the first few rows of the classroom and to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from the instructor when asking questions. Note that these restrictions must apply to all students (masked and unmasked). Faculty must not differentiate between students based on their decision to wear a mask.

### **COVID-19 Testing**

For the safety of our community, the university has determined that all students coming to campus for the fall semester must receive a viral COVID-19 test (antigen test or a nucleic acid amplification test such as PCR) within 72 hours prior to arrival in Austin. Students already residing in Austin will test within 72 hours of moving into the residence where they will reside for the academic semester. Finally, individuals who are already living in the residence in Austin where they will reside this academic semester will test within 72 hours (3 days) prior to the start of class on Aug. 25.

For students living in university-owned residential properties (on-campus residence halls, 2400 Nueces and the University Apartments), residence is conditional upon getting a [viral COVID-19 test](#) within 72 hours (three days) prior to moving in. They will need to show proof of a negative test result at check-in, prior to receiving their keys. Current residents who will continue living in these properties can test through the free [UT Proactive Community Testing program](#) as soon as possible but no later than August 20. Residents will show proof of a negative test to the check-in desks of their properties.

The university is continuing our Proactive Community Testing program which is available to students, faculty and staff. Resources are available to help students who test positive to navigate isolation, assist with absence notifications for class and provide additional support. These students are directed to contact the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line ([BCCAL](#)) for this support.

### **Seating Charts for Contact Tracing**

In order to streamline the contact tracing process, we are asking faculty members to keep seating charts for all classes with more than 30 students. Faculty members also have the discretion to assign seats. We are preparing seating chart templates for all the General Purpose Classrooms (GPC) that host our larger classes. The GPC seating chart templates will be shared with you later this week.

## Resources for Recording Course Content

For any faculty member who chooses to record course materials, resources and support are available through [LAITS](#). Their expertise and resources are exceptional and are available to advise and support faculty.

## Online Office Hours

Faculty members have the option of holding office hours online. Many students greatly appreciated the flexibility of online office hours last year, because this increased student access to instructors and minimized individual trips to campus.

## New Guidance for Faculty Living with Immunocompromised Dependents

Immunocompromised individuals are most at risk from COVID-19. Individual faculty and staff members should submit their requests for accommodations for their own medical conditions through the [ADA accommodation process](#).

Due to the nature of the Delta variant, UT recognizes that some faculty scheduled to teach in-person will need to move their courses online for the 2021 fall semester for the safety of an immunocompromised **dependent** who lives with the faculty member. Based on currently available data on serology post vaccination and expert opinion, a faculty member will automatically qualify for a flexible teaching modality arrangement if their dependent has one of the preapproved conditions listed below. The flexible teaching modality arrangement will allow the faculty member to move their course(s) and all meetings online for the 2021 fall semester. Faculty members with flexible teaching modality arrangements are expected not to travel during the 2021 fall semester.

- Dependents with solid organ transplants or stem cell transplant
- Dependents who are currently in cycle for chemotherapy or cancers associated with immune deficiency (leukemias and lymphomas)
- Dependents with chronic inflammatory diseases treated with systemic corticosteroid therapy > 20 mg prednisone daily, immunomodulator medications, and/or biologic agent
- Dependents with primary immune deficiency disorder
- Dependents with immune deficiencies due to HIV infectio
- Dependents with sickle cell disease (not trait)
- Dependents with surgical asplenia

At this time, living with a child under the age of 12 who is not immunocompromised will not qualify the faculty member for a flexible teaching modality arrangement.

Faculty may make their request for a [flexible teaching modality arrangement here](#).

### **Masks**

The university recommends members of our community follow the CDC guidance and wear masks, though it's not required, inside classrooms and indoor public settings regardless of their vaccination status. This recommendation does not apply to a private office or single-occupant cubicle. The university has ample supply of ASTM level 2 and 3 masks and will provide them at no cost to all faculty members, assistant instructors, and teaching assistants who are teaching this semester, and to all staff members who will be working on campus.

### **Vaccinations**

UT strongly encourages all members of our community to [get vaccinated](#) if they are able to do so. The university is communicating vaccination information directly to students to encourage them, and faculty members may also encourage their students to get vaccinated. The university is developing plans to hold a number of pop-up vaccination clinics around campus as students begin to move back to Austin.

Please note that the university is prohibited from inquiring about the vaccination status of any individual (student, staff, or faculty). Therefore, faculty members may not poll their class regarding their vaccination status, and they must treat all students equally, regardless of their vaccination status.

### **Flexible Work Arrangements**

Departments and units that have been planning for their staff members to return to onsite work are authorized to delay the return of non-student-facing/non-direct-student-supporting personnel until September 16. Vice President for Research Dan Jaffe will be providing research-specific guidance later today.

The current situation with COVID-19 is not how any of us hoped to begin the fall semester, and the timing of the appearance of the Delta variant is

unfortunate, as we had all hoped to be further along in our transition to a more normal semester. I am committed to working with campus leaders and public health experts to ensure that we make responsible decisions and adjustments as the situation in Austin changes. And I greatly appreciate the efforts of all faculty members during this challenging time.

Sincerely,



**SHARON L. WOOD** | Executive Vice President and Provost

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