



Dear Colleagues,

As we begin the fourth week of the fall semester, we wanted to thank all of you for your tremendous efforts during this challenging time. We continue to hear from many students who are thrilled to be back on campus enjoying a near-normal college experience. At the same time, we also hear the concerns many of you have shared about community spread of COVID-19. We assure you that we are listening to all perspectives and consider all concerns seriously. After evaluating the available data — and in close consultation with our public health experts — we want to share the university’s plan for campus operations beginning September 20, 2021.

### **In-Person Instruction**

Instructors who implemented temporary modality changes or adopted a reduced-density approach for in-person classes should begin transitioning to full density/in-person instruction beginning September 20 with the goal of resuming previously agreed upon teaching modalities no later than October 4, and sooner if possible. This two-week period will provide instructors the flexibility to manage this transition to best meet the educational goals of their individual classes, while also allowing the university to implement the additional testing capacity described below.

This transition timeline does not affect instructors who have already received an ADA accommodation or an alternative teaching modality arrangement (accounting for immunocompromised household members) for the entire fall semester. After October 4, we know there will continue to be instances where faculty members need to make temporary adjustments for a day or two — for

example, if they need to quarantine. These needs arise every semester, pandemic or not, and a faculty member's colleagues, department chairs and deans can help find ways to adjust for specific class periods, as needed.

### **Increased Staff Presence on Campus**

Last month, the university extended the timeframe for some staff members to return to campus. Beginning September 20, the university will begin to transition more staff back to campus through approved flexible work arrangements with the goal to have an increased presence by October 4. Approved flexible work arrangements may vary by unit. Staff members can expect to receive direction from their deans and vice presidents soon with specific guidance for their unit.

### **Classroom Notification & Contact Tracing**

We know there has been confusion related to classroom notifications and contact tracing. To expediate communication about positive cases, University Health Services recently adjusted their notification processes. Instructors and students will be quickly informed of possible exposure to COVID-19 for students who tested positive on campus or self-reported their positive test results directly to UHS. However, the timeline for notification of possible exposure for students who tested positive off campus and for positive cases reported by a third party will take longer because the university depends on data and verification from external sources. If students share with you that they have tested positive at an off-campus testing site, please encourage them to [self-report](#) to the university to expedite contact tracing.

Contact tracers will continue to call close contacts of an individual with a confirmed positive test. Instructors can assist this process by either [uploading seating charts](#) for their classes or encouraging students to submit their seating locations in all classrooms using a new feature in the Protect Texas Together mobile app. Instructors who wish to utilize the app locator should encourage students to [download or update the app](#) to access these features.

### **Increased Testing Capacity**

The university has secured a supply of at-home COVID-19 test kits designated for instructors teaching in person (faculty members, teaching assistants and assistant instructors), student-facing staff members, and other staff members

who are not able to socially distance while working on campus. Individuals in these categories will be able to obtain test kits within their units. Details about the distribution plans are being developed and will be shared soon.

We have engaged an outside vendor to expand rapid antigen testing capabilities significantly on campus. Testing will be available to all students, faculty and staff at pop-up clinics across campus, and appointments will not be necessary. Details about the test sites are being developed and will be shared with the community when available. We are also taking steps to increase student participation in weekly testing.

University Health Services will continue to offer PCR and rapid antigen tests on campus through our [Proactive Community Testing program](#).

### **Next Steps**

While the situation is beginning to improve in the Austin area, COVID-19 remains a serious concern that continues to have a significant impact on our professional and personal lives. Those impacts are amplified by news we read of breakthrough cases and concerns we all share. Based on our health experts' analysis of the testing and contact tracing data, we believe that the risk of spread on campus is low, but we will continue to monitor conditions closely. Vaccination remains our best tool for protection against COVID-19, and vaccines continue to be widely available.

In an effort to keep all members of our community as informed as possible, the university will begin sending a new weekly email — starting later this week — that includes the latest COVID-19 data and results of our testing, contact tracing, and incentive programs.

You can also help by continuing to use the effective tools that are available to us — wearing masks, getting vaccinated, getting boosters if and when they are recommended, and routine testing. Thank you for everything you are doing to support our students' educational experience in these very challenging times.

Sincerely yours,



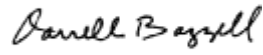
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