



Dear UT Austin Community,

I hope you had a great winter break and enjoyed some well-earned down time. As we prepare for the start of the spring semester, I want to update you on some adjustments we will be making to how we support our teaching and research missions while protecting our campus community during the first few weeks of the semester.

During the winter break, we continued to monitor local and statewide conditions related to the omicron variant. COVID-19 cases have rapidly increased during the past few weeks. Although severe illness and resulting hospitalizations appear less prevalent with this variant, we expect conditions in our community to be challenging during the next month. Considering the spike in cases, increased hospitalizations, and current and expected staff shortages in local hospitals and in some functional areas of campus, our university's COVID-19 Executive Committee determined short-term changes are needed as we start the spring semester. One of our key goals is to allow for a more gradual return to typical campus density, while starting classes and continuing our research to the extent possible.

Our campus will remain open, but we are taking the following actions to proactively manage density and help reduce additional virus transmission:

- **Teaching Protocols**

We are asking faculty members to teach remotely for the first two weeks of the

semester, with a target date of January 31 to return to the originally assigned teaching modality. Some may choose to teach in person, while also providing online delivery between January 18 and January 28. Students will be notified as soon as possible if any of their courses will be taught with an in-person option.

All classes will shift back to the assigned teaching modality on January 31. At that time, we do not expect that online delivery will be provided for classes listed as in-person or hybrid in the course schedule. Therefore, students will be expected to be present for all in-person activities. If a student must miss class for health reasons, the student will need to make up missed work using standard procedures and resources, including [student emergency services](#).

Students who are enrolled in classes that include clinical placements external to UT Austin will be contacted by their schools/colleges regarding expectations during the first two weeks of the semester.

- **Student Viral Testing Upon Return to Campus**

We encourage students to gradually return to campus leading up to January 31. **All students returning to campus for the spring semester should receive a [viral test](#) within 72 hours (three days) prior to returning to campus** or the surrounding community for in-person social activities, events or classes. Students, please review the [testing expectations](#) communicated last month.

Students who will be living in on-campus residence halls (including Dobie) or 2400 Nueces have received a message on a separate process for testing and should refer to that guidance.

Additionally, students are recommended to do routine testing with the [UT Proactive Community Testing \(PCT\)](#) program throughout the semester.

Some students may prefer to return earlier to access campus and community resources, including technology needed for online coursework. [Residence halls and dining services](#) will be open to accommodate them on January 14, and study spaces on the second floor of Perry-Castañeda Library will also be available.

- **Employee Return to Campus and Testing**

Unit leadership will work with their staff members to determine the level of

staffing needed to continue operations and serve the missions of the university through January 30, after which our expectation will be a return to the original plans for the spring semester. If you have questions or suggestions regarding your work arrangements during this time, please contact your supervisor.

University employees are also encouraged to **test via any method that is most convenient before returning to campus**. Free testing will continue to be available on campus, which allows the university to reach out quickly to contacts of infected individuals to help stop the spread of the virus. Employees should report to the [Occupational Health Program \(OHP\)](#) if you have tested positive, have symptoms of COVID-19 even if you test negative, or if you have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive.

- **Research Operations**

The Office of the Vice President for Research is reaching out separately to associate deans for research, principal investigators (PIs), researchers and graduate students about research laboratories and research facilities. There will be no change in the Research Restart level or in density requirements at this time, but PIs are encouraged to arrange for a portion of their group to work remotely through the end of the month to allow for a more gradual increase in the laboratory occupancy.

- **New Isolation and Quarantine Guidelines**

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recently shortened isolation and quarantine guidance for the public. Your vaccination status determines your guidelines, and you should also note the differences in restrictions for those who are boosted or within two to six months of their primary series, depending on vaccine brand. Please read more [here](#), including UT Austin's recommendations for reducing the residual risk of transmission after the minimum five-day isolation period has ended should your work require you to return after five days.

- **Masking Recommended**

We continue to recommend wearing masks while indoors, regardless of vaccination status. As you can see in the new CDC guidelines above, masking is particularly important if you have been [exposed](#).

- **Get Vaccinated and Boosted**

The best way to prevent getting the virus and spreading it to others is getting vaccinated or boosted if you are eligible (six months or more since you

completed the primary two doses of the Moderna vaccine, five months or more since you completed the primary two doses of the Pfizer vaccine, or two months or more since the primary dose of Johnson & Johnson). The university [offers](#) free vaccinations for students, faculty and staff through three locations: University Health Services, UT Health Austin, and the Family Wellness Clinic. We also plan to offer additional pop-up opportunities to receive a booster at the start of the semester– stay tuned for details.

- **Avoid Gathering in Confined Spaces**

Individuals should minimize gatherings in small, confined spaces for meals or meetings.

- **Recommend Online or Outdoor Events**

Events should be held online or outdoors whenever possible until January 31. If an event must stay indoors, please be mindful of our masking recommendations and consider a larger space to allow for social distancing. Decisions about whether to go forward with events will be made by college, school or unit leadership.

- **Travel Policy**

Our policies for domestic and international travel remain in place. Please see our guidelines [here](#).

With your help and perseverance, we will get through this latest challenge and continue the meaningful work of our university as we [Protect Texas Together](#). I am grateful for your hard work and dedication to our mission and look forward to accomplishing great things together in 2022.

Sincerely yours,



Jay Hartzell
President



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