**Faculty Senate Statement on Minimum Health and Safety Procedures for Return to Campus**

New cases of COVID-19 have risen to almost 130,000 cases per day nationwide as of mid-August and are increasing at a rate exceeding 300 new cases per 100,000 people in Texas. Hospitalizations are approaching 20 new admissions per 100 beds and increasing dramatically. Almost 500 fellow Texans died from COVID-19 this week alone, with a projected total of over 2,000 deaths in August … an incredibly disturbing trend. (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/>)

Last fall, the number of hospitalizations from COVID-19 was used as one metric to move teaching online. Rushing back to the classroom this week puts everyone at risk, particularly when barely half of the state’s population is fully vaccinated, 97% of Texas counties are classified as “High Risk,” and booster doses may be required.

Clearly, online teaching is not always optimal, but recent experience has shown us it can work well. We can move to remote classes until the highly transmissible Delta variant surge is brought under control, and the lives, health, and well-being of our faculty, staff, and students is ensured.

As faculty and librarians at Texas State, we recognize the importance of in-person education and being on campus for our students.  The classroom, and the broader campus experience, is why we became educators. We are also concerned, however, that Texas State University is not prepared for the health and safety challenges posed by the spread of the Delta variant. We understand that the university administration is limited by the governor’s executive order, and as such, has not sought to reduce density on campus or implement many of the safety measures routinely found at other universities as recommended by the CDC.

As faculty, we believe that, at the very least, the following practices and protocols should be in place as we begin the Fall semester:

* Everyone who comes to campus must properly wear a CDC-recommended face covering and such face coverings must be mandatory for attending in-person classes.
* Faculty and librarians have the right to require face coverings in their classrooms, library spaces, and offices and cannot be compelled to remain in the classroom or library spaces if any student~~s~~ remain unmasked or inadequately masked (not sufficiently covering nose and mouth) after being asked to put their mask on.
* The university must make public a comprehensive, science-based protocol for ensuring accuracy with respect to the vaccination status of all members of the campus community. The campus community must be informed weekly of the absolute number and rate-of-change of Covid cases on campus.
* Faculty have the right to be informed of positive test cases in their classroom and all university community members must be required to report to Bobcat Trace.
* The university has the responsibility to inform students enrolled in the class of positive test cases in their classroom.
* Given differential risk thresholds, faculty must have the right to adapt teaching modalities in response to an increased risk from Covid-19 to themselves and/or to family or household members, even if the University has not shifted entirely to a remote modality. The freedom to adapt teaching modality for faculty/staff with children under 12 will provide invaluable relief for many and may be critical in controlling the ongoing spread of the virus.
* The University has an obligation to reduce crowding in campus public spaces, including but not limited to elevators, stairwells, and other routinely crowded spaces.  The effective enforcement of safety protocols, with clear instructions for faculty, librarians, students, and staff on peacefully and effectively handling violations is critical to dispatching that obligation.
* Faculty and librarians have the right to transparency as to what metrics will prompt a “pivot” towards remote or hybrid teaching, and representation on the committee(s) or bodies developing these metrics.

We are not alone in imploring our administration to listen to scientific and healthcare experts, adopt a reasonable and prudent posture, and create a safer haven for effective learning:

* University of Texas at Austin
  + Hundreds of faculty ask UT to require vaccines, masks on campus as COVID-19 resurges
  + <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2021/08/19/hundreds-university-texas-faculty-ask-for-covid-mask-vaccine-mandate/8178345002/>
* Louisiana State University
  + LSU faculty petition seeks return to online, hybrid classes for fall
  + https://www.businessreport.com/business/lsu-faculty-petition-seeks-return-to-online-hybrid-classes-for-fall
* University of Massachusetts at Boston
  + Faculty Staff Union Statement on Minimum Health and Safety Procedures for Return to Campus
  + <https://fsu.umb.edu/content/urgent-survey-vote-fsu-statement-fall-opening-0>
* University of North Carolina
  + ‘The Risks Are Too High’: UNC Faculty Petition for Remote Learning
  + <https://chapelboro.com/news/coronavirus-covid-19/the-risks-are-too-high-unc-faculty-petition-for-remote-learning>
* University of Iowa
  + Hundreds of UI employees call for stricter COVID-19 mitigation measures
  + <https://dailyiowan.com/2021/08/11/hundreds-of-ui-employees-call-for-stricter-covid-19-mitigation-measures/>
* Central Michigan University
  + Petition calls for CMU COVID-19 vaccine mandate
  + https://www.wnem.com/news/petition-calls-for-cmu-covid-19-vaccine-mandate/article\_97734892-fbd6-11eb-959b-6398e2eeec74.html
* Iowa State University
  + Iowa State faculty calling for a mask mandate, similar to UI faculty's recent demands
  + https://www.amestrib.com/story/news/education/2021/08/17/isu-iowa-state-university-faculty-petition-mask-mandate-covid-delta-variant/8155178002/
* Rutgers University
  + Petition calls for mandatory faculty COVID-19 vaccinations at Rutgers
  + https://www.nj.com/education/2021/08/petition-calls-for-mandatory-faculty-covid-19-vaccinations-at-rutgers.html
* University of Kansas
  + KU student starts petition to require students, staff to get COVID-19 vaccinations
  + https://www.kmbc.com/article/ku-student-starts-petition-to-require-students-staff-to-get-covid-19-vaccinations/37083497#
* Clemson University
  + No masks, no class. Clemson professors plan walkout over lack of COVID precautions
  + https://www.thestate.com/news/coronavirus/article253518304.html
* University of South Carolina
  + USC faculty group wants Pastides to put mask mandate back on campus
  + https://www.wltx.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/mask-mandate-university-of-south-carolina-faculty/101-c6592b12-954b-4f4a-a577-edab0978f122