

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA FACULTY SENATE

Special Called Meeting of the Faculty Senate

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

This session was held entirely online.

PRESIDING Chair Audrey Korsgaard

CHAIR AUDREY KORSGAARD called the meeting to order at 3:00pm EST. Chair Korsgaard is the incoming chair for 2021-2022.

INTERIM PRESIDENT PASTIDES thanked Chair Korsgaard for the opportunity to speak to Faculty Senate. He is excited to share what we, the University of South Carolina, a) can do, b) cannot do, and c) have been planning regarding the upcoming fall in preparation of the return to campus and keeping everyone safe. To qualify himself, Dr. Pastides has spent his entire career in the health field as an epidemiologist. He is on a variety of CDC task forces and co-chaired the North and South Carolina pandemic task force. President Pastides believes that being vaccinated is an important and valid action in reducing the chance of getting COVID. Face masks, social distancing, and hand washing are also valuable tools, although they are not as effective as getting vaccinated.

UofSC was the only university in South Carolina to mandate a return to school testing requirement for faculty, students, and staff. Members who had proof of vaccinations within 90 days were exempted. Other colleges have now adopted this policy.

UofSC is also one of the first schools to require masks in classrooms. The legislature stated that this is not legal. As a result, the university is required to rescind this requirement, but we do strongly encourage the use of face masks indoors. Several days later, Professor Richard Creswick (Department of Physics) brought suit against the attorney general and university suggesting that the proviso was unclear and did not need to be observed. If Professor Creswick's suit is sustained, President Pastides will work with the Board of Trustees regarding the mask decision. Whatever the court ruling, President Pastides stated that we must move forward with a strong campaign for vaccinations and mask wearing for the health of our community. Widely visible vaccination stations will be available on campus. Faculty and staff may also bring family members on campus to be vaccinated. These services are free.

INTERIM PROVOST STEPHEN CUTLER thanked Faculty Senate for allowing him time. He is very committed to having a safe community. UofSC is only one of five universities to have developed a saliva-based test. Health scientists at UofSC doubled up their efforts to help develop solutions. Some of these individuals include Helmut Albrecht, Julie Sease, Sean Norman, Carole Bannister, and Mike Wyatt. Dean Chandler in the School of Public Health also significantly helped us toward the mitigation strategies.

We will continue to track, monitor, and pivot when necessary. This meeting is an example of our willingness to monitor. During this fall, we may see a slight rise in the number of cases, but we

intend to dampen the cases down through weekly saliva-base testing of our students, staff, and faculty and monitoring the sewer models. We are confident we can mitigate this virus.

It is important to update your *MyHealth* information with vaccine information. Your information is secured through HIPPA.

We plan to offer a traditional university experience this year while being safe and healthy. Faculty members' dedication to the university and its students is outstanding. Provost Cutler provided thanks to Dr. Addy and Dr. Kelly for developing ADA guidelines for faculty and staff.

Provost Cutler is in communication with provosts at other universities. He stated that UofSC offers more mitigation solutions than any other university. The only other university that offers a saliva-based test is The University of Georgia and The University of Kentucky.

SENATOR KRISTINA SCHWOEBEL asked if the testing include persons who are also vaccinated.

PROVOST CUTLER stated yes, both vaccinated and unvaccinated will be tested.

SENATOR MIHALIK asked how are we going to handle the spread of the virus in a classroom?

PROVOST CUTLER responded that the recommendation of 6 feet social distancing (as stated last year) was recommended to make people feel comfortable. Regarding the Delta variant, we don't know what the accurate distance. He did affirm that he is tracking the research literature very closely.

SENATOR LIANG MA asked if we could add to the covid dashboard.

PROVOST CUTLER stated that Dr. Stacy will provide an update on this issue.

SENATOR KIRK RANDAZZO asked given the large class size (e.g., more than 150 students), within classes and the inability to mandate masks, can faculty offer extra credit for wearing masks?

PROVOST CUTLER responded that according to the scientific literature and social distancing, the 6 foot distance is from the original variant, not the Delta variant. The science will probably show that masks will be more effective than social distancing. Then science will show that vaccinations are more effective than masks. Regarding wearing masks, it is an accreditation issue. It could be problematic to offer extra credit. We will obtain confirmation from a Vice Provost.

DR JASON STACY stated that UofSC has a higher rate of compliance than the entire state of South Carolina. There are fewer faculty vaccinated than on campus students and staff. Professor Stacy encouraged faculty to become vaccinated. If already vaccinated, to please upload their vaccinated card information to myhealth.sc.edu. Vaccinations are available free by appointment

or walk-in at the health center. For those who were vaccinated at the UofSC health center, the vaccinated card information is automatically uploaded into myhealth.sc.edu.

COVID-19 rates will be updated weekly on the dashboard. The initial reporting date will be August 1, 2021. There are links for current guidelines.

SENATOR ED MADDEN asked if the guidelines will be updated for the experiential learning.

PROVOST CUTLER stated that the information will be updated.

SENATOR FRANK THORNE noted that many colleagues teach large courses. When the classroom is filled and students begin to cough, how should the instructor respond?

PROFESSOR STACY stated that it is acceptable to invite students to go in the hallway and get water or tissue and return to class when he or she feels ready.

SENATOR DENISE MCGILL inquired about campus life. Will campus organizations meet in-person and are we able to enforce stronger guidelines than the legal limits?

PRESIDENT PASTIDES stated that enforcement does work better than encouragement. The university is very aware and concerned about the virus. There is no prohibition on strong encouragement and the Carolina Creed. The Delta variant is a risk for everyone. We all need to speak out, role model, and encourage people to act safely (e.g., wear a mask). Currently, we don't have a method to legally force people to act in a specific manner.

SENATOR SABRINA WILLIAMS stated that she does not feel safe coming back to work. Delta variant is more dangerous. She teaches in a lab that is hands-on. Aside from encouragement, what are the safeguard measures.

PRESIDENT PASTIDES' goal is that all colleagues and students will be wearing masks. We will work with the Senate. Enhancements will also be present (e.g., plexiglass). Most of the country is not shutting down. Most universities are operating the same as UofSC. We are planning and hoping for a safe environment. We all need to do our part in getting vaccinated. We need to start off the year in a positive manner.

PROVOST CUTLER reminded the Faculty Senate that this year, unlike last year, we have the vaccine. This makes entering the classroom safer than last year.

SENATOR MARIUS VALDEZ mentioned that several faculty members are purchasing air purifiers for the classroom. Has the university thought about purchasing air purifiers?

PRESIDENT PASTIDES stated that the university was looking at this issue. We first need to be convinced that they work.

SENATOR JOSH STONE asked once the vaccine obtains full approval from the FDA, will it be required for the faculty and students.

PRESIDENT PASTIDES stated that he will take it up with the Board of Trustees.

SENATOR MARK MINETT asked for a) clarification on the frequency of testing and b) what is the anticipated spike of COVID?

PROVOST CUTLER stated that the testing will be the same as spring 2021. Regarding the anticipated numbers, Provost Cutler didn't have them readily available. He will provide updates with the deans.

SENATOR MINETT inquired why are faculty are unable to switch modality?

PROVOST CUTLER stated that decisions need to be made at the unit level so work with the department chair and dean. There also needs to be a rational justification to ensure continuity of teaching.

SENATOR THORNE asked about the effectiveness of HEPA filters and the ability to have them classrooms.

DR. PASTIDES reaffirmed that it is not a matter of money. He is checking into the situation. No one is objectionable to the HEPA filters in classrooms.

SENATOR JOY JACKSON inquired about modality and asked for clarity of the 5% rule. There are immuno-compromised faculty and concern about being in the classroom.

PROVOST CUTLER stated that he spoke with the deans and encouraged faculty to speak with chairs regarding updates.

SENATOR DAVID FUENTE asked if facilities is the only unit allowed to post COVID signage. The senator would like to be able to post signage regarding wearing masks.

PRESIDENT PASTIDES agreed that this is acceptable. The signage should be respectful. He will notify facilities that units will collaborate in posting signage.

PROVOST CUTLER stated that signs are available on the university website for downloading.

SENATOR RANDAZZO asked if faculty are allowed to take photos of the class seating in case students are diagnosed with COVID. This will make it easier to notify students should a case arise. Also, in response to the attorney general and safe work environment.

PROVOST CUTLER stated that in terms of the safe work environment question, the university will need to get back with the Faculty Senate.

VICE PROVOST SANDRA KELLY stated that the Provost Office is rolling out assistance with seating charts. Photos in big classes do not work well with smart phones and there are also issues

with confidentiality. Dr. Kelly will check with legal on the photo for classes of 50-100 size of classes.

PROVOST CUTLER stated that we need to be very careful of “wholesale” switching of modality. We want to keep faculty, students, and staff safe. Keep working with deans and chairs. There may be other instructors who can teach face-to-face and other people who teach online.

SENATOR MINETT introduced a resolution.

Resolution

1. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages the University Administration to implement CDC protocols on COVID-19 and, in the future, to adjust its safety protocols as necessary to comply with any changes in CDC guidelines.
2. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to implement the following mask mandate for all vaccinated and unvaccinated members of the University community, with limited exceptions allowed for documented health reasons and until changes in CDC guidelines and a reasonable assessment of the likely impact on public health suggest it is no longer advisable: “Effective immediately, the University of South Carolina requires face coverings to be worn at all times inside all campus buildings, unless you are in your own residence hall room, private office or you are actively eating or drinking inside campus dining facilities. There is no requirement to wear a face covering outdoors.”
3. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to implement a mandatory weekly testing regime for all students, staff, and instructors, regardless of vaccination status, until changes in CDC guidelines and a reasonable assessment of the likely impact on public health suggest it is no longer advisable.
4. In the absence of the mask mandate encouraged in Item 2, the Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to allow faculty and instructors to require fully masked classrooms and interactions with students outside of the classroom.
5. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to, in consultation with the appropriate committees of the Faculty Senate, develop and authorize reasonable accommodations to safeguard the health of faculty and instructors, including but not limited to modified duties, section changes, rescheduling individual Fall 2021 courses to Spring 2022, and changes in course modality. Key factors the University Administration should consider include the extent to which the University implements the protocols encouraged in Items 1-4, class size, University vaccination rates, and whether the faculty member or instructor or close contacts of the faculty member or instructor are medically unable to be vaccinated, as is currently the case with close contacts who are under the age of 12 or are immunocompromised.
6. The Faculty Senate grants approval, for Fall 2021, of any class modality change necessary to implement the accommodations contemplated in Item 5.
7. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages the University Administration to mitigate airborne transmission by adopting the following classroom protocols recommended by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Health Security: minimum

MERV 13 HVAC filters; portable HEPA air filtration units in each classroom, and CO2 monitors in each classroom

Discussion was held. Motion was voted on and the resolution passed.

Other Information for the Good of the Order

PRESIDENT PASTIDES AND PROVOST CUTLER reaffirmed that social distancing does help in mitigating the virus. President Pastides stated that the dashboard regarding our efforts in the virus will be posted within the next week.

SENATOR BYARS thanked senators for considering the resolution and taking this issue seriously.

SENATOR MIHALIK asked if the approval process for getting courses online is being extended.

CHAIR KORSGAARD stated that the approval process was extended by the Steering Committee until the emergency over. Faculty still need to get approval with their department chair and/or dean to schedule online courses.

SENATOR VALTORTA congratulated Chair Korsgaard for an excellent job at this meeting.

SENATOR STERN asked for clarification on the 5% rule of teaching online.

CHAIR KORSGAARD will get obtain clarification.

The next Faculty Senate meeting is August 19, 2021 at 3:45pm EST.

CHAIR KORSGAARD thanked the senators who are rotating off for their service.

The meeting adjourned at 4:44pm EST