

Dear Colleagues,

I am grateful for the many messages we have received from students, faculty, librarians, and staff sharing invaluable insights about the beginning of the semester. The wide range of input across stakeholders, disciplines, and geographies is a testament to the diversity of our community and the panoply of academic programs that USF offers. I understand — and share — your concerns about the impact of the Omicron surge on the health of our students, faculty, librarians, and staff, and the importance of ensuring that we are adequately prepared for the return of students to in-person classes. This email shares information with faculty, librarians, and academic staff about the decision to reopen for in-person classes, as well as updates regarding our COVID-19 mitigation measures.

As you know, after much care and discernment, university leadership has made the decision to continue with the semester as planned. Our decision-making throughout the pandemic has been guided by two principles: our responsibility for students' educational and socio-emotional needs and our shared commitment to the safety and well-being of the wider USF community. We carefully considered the available information regarding our COVID mitigation efforts, and those of our peers, alongside city, state, and federal advisories, and have discussed how best to navigate these concerns with our health and medical consultants. We have also reached out to key stakeholders in academic affairs including our faculty leadership, our deans, and key committees such as Continuity of Instruction to ensure we understand the range of concerns in our community and can work to address them.

I recognize that thoughtful people can disagree on the best approaches, even as we agree on the imperatives of taking care of our students and our community. These are difficult decisions in complex and evolving circumstances. I am committed to navigating these challenging decisions with transparency and consultation with key stakeholders and have reached out to faculty leadership to convene a joint working group to ensure that faculty expertise and perspectives continue to be central to our efforts and decisions. As part of this commitment, I want to provide the rationale and insights into our deliberations below:

#### Why do we intend to reopen as planned?

We have learned a tremendous amount from the fall about how to operate in a pandemic environment and keep our community as safe as possible. With vaccination rates as high as USF's, a vaccination and booster mandate in place, and a demonstrated track record of implementing testing, mask-wearing, quarantining, contact tracing, and prudent facilities management, USF is prepared to provide a safe space for teaching and learning starting next week. In fall 2021, there was no documented classroom transmission of COVID-19. Measures such as turning off residence hall and building access to students until they upload their documentation have incentivized our students to comply promptly and we anticipate exceeding last semester's student vaccination rate. Opening for in-person instruction as scheduled allows the university to require testing and vaccination and booster documentation and thus accelerates our ability to protect our community's health and welfare.

We have learned from listening to students and faculty throughout the pandemic that in-person learning is the preferred modality and is one of USF's distinctive strengths. We have also seen the mental health toll the pandemic has taken on students, with the most severe consequences of isolation disproportionately felt by those students with the fewest resources and the least stable support systems. Interacting with faculty and mentors and learning beside peers in person is vital to the learning experience at USF and one that our students are eager to continue, as soon as we can do so safely.

#### Are there any special circumstances or exceptions?

Yes. The School of Law's semester began on Jan. 10, and since full testing protocols were not yet in place at that time, classes began remotely and will return in person on Jan. 24. The School of Education's weekend and evening hybrid classes — which largely serve working professionals in K-12 and higher education institutions, community organizations, and mental health clinics — will begin online in order to accommodate additional guidelines and restrictions placed on students by the institutions within which they work. We are currently working with our health consultants and distributed campus leaders to determine whether different mitigation measures may be necessary in locations with higher community positivity rates.

Temporary pivots to remote can be used for in-person classes, with dean's office approval, in the following cases: an instructor must quarantine due to a COVID-19 exposure; a significant number of students have been exposed to or have tested positive for COVID-19; a significant number of students are experiencing delays in returning to campus; or faculty caregiving circumstances have changed due to COVID-19 exposures or school closures. Classes that need to be in person due to the nature of the learning experience and/or regulations will need to pursue other strategies when faced with these circumstances; in such situations, instructors should consult with their dean's office. Instructors who need accommodations related to in-person instruction should contact Human Resources at [leaves@usfca.edu](mailto:leaves@usfca.edu). Other exceptions may be made by deans on a case-by-case basis depending on pedagogical need.

Below, I provide some updates on the mitigation measures the university is using to achieve our goals of maintaining continuity of instruction while keeping our communities as safe as possible.

#### Mandatory Vaccination Policy

All students, faculty, librarians, and staff are required to be vaccinated and have a booster (when eligible) resulting in a nearly fully vaccinated population among our campuses.

- At this point in time, 94.7 percent of continuing students who are currently registered for one or more in-person classes are vaccinated and students continue to upload their documentation. 74.5 percent of new spring 2022 admits are currently fully vaccinated. Additional students are uploading their documentation daily.
- In total to date, 93.6 percent of students are fully vaccinated. We expect to meet or exceed our fall vaccination numbers of 96.8 percent.
- To date, 97 percent of faculty, staff, and librarians have attested to being fully vaccinated.

#### Testing

All students, faculty, librarians, and staff are required to have a negative test result prior to entering classes or, in the case of employees, prior to returning to campus. USF is conducting reentry testing for all students and employees to identify and isolate any positive cases that might come from the community prior to arrival. We are also conducting ongoing surveillance testing for those at highest risk (such as unvaccinated students). Testing is available at no cost **through on-campus testing sites managed by Student Life**, through health care providers, or through tests that can be sent to the homes of faculty, librarians, and staff who need them. As of today, **USF has a 3.0 percent positivity rate** with 1,750 tests completed as part of USF-administered testing. USF's **COVID cases dashboard** is updated daily.

#### Campus Density, Masks, and Other Mitigation Strategies

The university is following protocols outlined by the California Department of Public Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in conjunction with ongoing discussions with health and medical consultants, including reentry and surveillance testing, masking, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation protocols, and prudent facilities management to keep our on-campus community as safe as possible. Student Life is providing N95 masks to high-risk individuals such as unvaccinated faculty, students, and staff, and KN95 and surgical masks will also be provided to the schools and college as supplies allow. We continue to reduce density by limiting in-person meetings and events, holding faculty and staff meetings and office hours remotely, and, when job functions allow, permitting staff who can work at home to maintain a hybrid or remote work schedule. In this way, we focus our on-campus activities on student learning.

#### Parents and Caregivers

We know that COVID may create disruptions to our operations and our employees' daily lives. We also know that these disruptions can fall disproportionately on the shoulders of those who are parents or caregivers or who have less-established support systems. Deans and supervisors have the discretion to offer faculty, librarians, and staff the flexibility they need to navigate such disruptions through temporary switches to remote or hybrid teaching or working. Similarly, when instructors and staff members are faced with positive COVID tests and exposures within their own families, in addition to exposures in our workplace, we expect that our deans and supervisors will work with employees to make reasonable alternative arrangements.

As we prepare for yet another semester of uncertainty and anxiety, even amidst news that the Omicron variant may at last be retreating, we are all feeling the fatigue and stress of this latest set of pandemic challenges. Our north star through these uncertain times is our deep commitment to our students' learning experience and our mutual concern for one another. I am grateful to each of you for the labor and care that you are putting into welcoming our students back to class and to our campuses and look forward to continuing to work together for the health and well-being of all members of our community.

Warmly,



Chinyere Oparah  
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

#### Office of the Provost

(415) 422-6136 | Map & Directions | Contact Us