

STATEMENT BY THE JOINT UFF-UF/GAU COVID TASK FORCE August 3, 2021

The University of Florida faces a real emergency. We simply cannot ignore the recent precipitous rise in COVID infections, pretending that plans that may have seemed reasonable even a few weeks ago are still up to today's challenge.

The case for strategic reconsideration makes itself (using public data available 8/1/21):

- Nationwide, COVID infection rates are doubling (or more) weekly, driven primarily by the spread of the Delta variant, which is much more easily and rapidly spread.
- Governments—federal, state, and local—and businesses (Google, Disney, Publix, Ford, McDonalds, among many others) are taking strong measures to adapt to the new threat.
- Evidence indicates that Delta may be spread by and to both vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals.
- On Saturday, July 31, Florida reported 21,683 new COVID cases: the highest one-day total so far.
- As of Sunday, August 1, Florida reported a new record for COVID hospitalizations (10,207; exceeding the previous record set July 27).
- Florida leads the nation for COVID hospitalizations per capita, in both overall and pediatric admissions.

The University must act quickly to continually adapt to these changing—and accelerating—dynamics, and seriously reconsider current Fall 2021 re-opening plans and protocols. Despite legal precedents dating back to 1905, when the U.S. government mandated universal vaccination against yellow fever, Governor DeSantis has decided that COVID vaccination and even mandatory mask-wearing is an unacceptable infringement on personal freedom in state institutions. We believe that is a serious, life-threatening error, and are appalled at his decision.

Failing such obvious, health-affirming options, we demand that UF and its Administration:

- Strongly, publicly, and repeatedly encourage universal vaccination for all UF students, faculty, and staff (with exceptions for medical, religious, and other valid reasons). E-mail reminders are not enough and are often relegated to “junk” files. Instead, campus leaders of all types and levels must personally exhort—and model—such action.
- Require at least weekly COVID testing for all unvaccinated individuals with continuation of prior quarantine protocols for those testing positive
- Similarly, require medically-approved, universal mask protection and material support for faculty, students and staff for all necessary in-person and/or indoor instruction and/or normal “office” functions
- Immediately provide remote learning teaching/learning options for all Fall 2021 class sections wherever possible, for all faculty and students, with expedited, clear petition/appeal procedures for faculty and graduate teaching/research assistants requesting and/or being denied off-site accommodation
- Reconsider requirements for vendors, visitors, et al. in light of recent escalating infection rates
- Publicly disclose UF methodology and decision processes and criteria regarding plans and actions designed to protect the health and safety of all on the UF campus. (Example: Data and sources used to estimate vaccination rates among students).

UFF-UF and UF-GAU will continue to use our collective bargaining agreements to keep our members as safe as we can. We applaud the UF Administration announcement today regarding additional health protocols at Commencement ceremonies as clear recognition of the need for continuing adaptation to changing pandemic conditions.

This is urgent. Lives, livelihoods and futures depend upon our acting now. UF must take a stand.