



## COUNCIL OF FACULTY SENATE CHAIRS

Date: August 6, 2021

To: Nevada State Board of Health (Dr. Jon Pennell, D.V.M., Chairperson; Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, M.D., Vice Chair; Dr. Trudy Larson, M.D.; Dr. Monica Ponce, D.D.S.; Judith Bittner; Charles Smith), Chief Medical Officer Ihsan Azzam, Ph.D., M.D.; Director Richard Whitley, M.S.

From: Amy Pason, Chair of Faculty Senate Chairs Council on behalf of the 2021-22 Council of Chairs

Subject: Public Comment for August 10, 2021 meeting; re: COVID-19 vaccine mandate

The Faculty Senates are the elected bodies of our Nevada State Higher Education institutions that represent both academic and administrative faculty across our system. As part of shared governance, Faculty Senates give recommendation and/or have decision-making authority with institutional operations, curriculum, and, most importantly, the success and well-being of our students. The Council of Faculty Senate Chairs includes all chairs of our individual institution Senates (and the NSHE System Office), and represent the interests of all faculty. As we enter into the 4<sup>th</sup> semester of this on-going pandemic, we realize that conditions have changed, and we must change the safety protocols on our campuses in light of new variants and the new tools (vaccines) at our disposal.

We support the NSHE COVID Task Force recommendation to require the COVID-19 vaccination for all students returning to in-person learning on our campuses. **We request the State Board of Health deliberate mandating COVID-19 vaccinations for all higher education students. We believe a vaccine mandate is essential for a safe and healthy academic year.**

Whereas in other states, individual institutions or higher education systems have authority to require students to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, [NSHE legal counsel issued an analysis](#) stating that only the State Board of Health may require vaccinations for NSHE university and college students. Further, NRS Chapter 439 and NAC Chapter 441A currently does not include community college students as part of the recommended vaccination requirements, thus, we would ask that the State Board of Health consider adopting an emergency order related to mandating the COVID-19 vaccine that would apply to every student attending an NSHE university, state college, and community college.

In order for our campuses to have a safe, return to in-person instruction, we will need to utilize all the COVID safety measures available. Vaccines, we believe, are the most important measure we have. Short of a vaccine mandate, our campuses will have to implement (in short time) systems to regularly test and contract trace our student population to control the spread of the



disease. Last academic year, campuses across the country that had in-person instruction utilized regular testing of students along with masks and social distancing as we did not yet have a vaccine. Our campuses would have to model these measures if our students will not be vaccinated. The personnel, time, and testing resources needed for an endeavor are costly; ensuring students are vaccinated is more cost and time efficient. Not all our campuses will be equipped nor have the capacity to test students in this way, especially as many of our campuses have been helping test and trace within our larger communities. Although our campuses will continue the measures of face coverings, hygiene, and other cleaning protocols, we need the vaccine as an extra level of protection to slow the spread of the virus and the harm it causes. In-person learning requires larger groups together for extended period of time, making instruction a riskier activity that required increased safety measures.

Continued spread of COVID-19 puts our students, faculty, staff, and community at risk. This virus has disrupted our ability to educate students in Nevada, which is disrupted more for students who may get sick. Our institutions want to do our part to limit the spread of the virus and protect our campuses and surrounding communities, but we currently lack the authority to do the one measure we believe to be essential in this fight: a COVID-19 vaccine mandate. We ask the State Board of Health to aid us in our efforts by considering this issue and/or issuing guidance or authority to our institutions to take the actions necessary to keep our faculty, staff, and students safe this year.

