



University of Nevada, Reno

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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
2021-22 Faculty Senate

SUBJECT: Public Comment, August 10, 2021 Meeting; Re: COVID-19 Vaccines

The Faculty Senate of the University of Nevada, Reno is the elected body representing both academic and administrative faculty. As part of shared governance, the Faculty Senate gives recommendations and/or has decision-making authority with institutional operations, curriculum, and, most importantly, the success and well-being of our students.

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

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. Last year, our campus offered a majority of courses remotely to reduce gatherings of faculty and students on campus. For courses held in-person, students were socially distanced and all wore face coverings indoors and out. Upgrading ventilation systems as well as increased cleaning protocols were also used to keep the virus at bay. This year, we no longer have requirements for social distancing or reduced capacity numbers, assuming that community transmission would be low and vaccination rates would be high. As we enter into the 4th semester of this pandemic, our return to in-person learning is challenged by low vaccination rates and the surge of the delta variant.

We are confident we can resume safe in-person instruction, including wearing masks indoors, but we also need the added safety measure of having our students vaccinated. Following the Governor's mandate, our faculty and staff will be vaccinated or submit to weekly testing, and we need the same type of requirements for our students. In-person learning is inherently a more risky activity as we have to gather in larger groups, indoors, for extended periods. Thus, it is necessary to have more safety measures in place. It is by using all safety tools at our disposal that we can keep our campus community safe, but also do our part to slow community spread of the virus.

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](#) that only the State Board of Health may require vaccinations for NSHE university and college students. 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.

In Fall 2020, universities that had in-person instruction (in the absence of vaccines) included regular COVID-19 testing and tracing of all their students. In the absence of a vaccine mandate, our institution would have to attempt to implement similar strategies for in-person instruction this Fall—with very little time or resources to put this kind of testing and tracing in place. Ensuring students are vaccinated is a more feasible alternative, yet we are limited to act.

Our campus is doing our part to keep our students, staff, and faculty safe with continued facial-covering requirements and hygiene, but we need the vaccine mandate in addition. We can ensure our students' education will not be disrupted this year due to outbreaks, the need to go remote, or students becoming ill for long periods of time if all get vaccinated. Moreover, this will help us do our part as a campus to limit the spread in our own communities.