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COVID-19 Policies

Faculty Senate Resolutions

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## **Faculty Senate Regarding Covid-19 Policies**

Faculty Senators

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## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

### **Resolution for the Faculty Senate Regarding Covid-19 Policies**

*Over the last 18 months, Covid-19 has killed over 4.3 million people globally, including over 620,000 in the [United States](#) and over 11,900 people in [Alabama](#). As we begin the Fall 2021 semester at the University of South Alabama with full classrooms and few mitigations other than a weakly-enforced masking requirement, a new Delta variant of the virus is rapidly spreading throughout our region and community that has proven to be significantly more transmissible than the original virus and poses an immediate and urgent public health crisis<sup>1</sup>. While a variety of vaccines--as well as public health policies--are evidenced to drastically reduce the threat of transmission and reduce hospitalizations and deaths, we have not yet as a larger community embraced them. Consequently, we enter into the Fall 2021 semester facing a more dangerous stage of the COVID-19 pandemic with fewer safety and health regulations in place than we had in the Fall of 2020, despite the availability of scientifically proven life-saving vaccines and transmission mitigation strategies.*

WHEREAS the University of South Alabama has established COVID-19 policy decision-making parameters that include: federal, state or local government mandates; the level of regional risk as classified by the Alabama Department of Public Health; the percentage of COVID-19 positive tests in Mobile county; the healthcare capacity in Mobile and neighboring counties; the number of cases among students and employees at the USA campus; the percentage of positive tests among students and employees, and the University's ability to provide essential services including quarantine and isolation; and,

WHEREAS the rate of COVID-19 transmission in our County and State are both currently among the highest in the nation (Mobile County was ranked 20th in the nation for per capita cases of COVID-19, 10th for per capita COVID-19 deaths, and has a test positive rate more than 3 times the national average); and,

WHEREAS the percentage of people vaccinated in Alabama is among the lowest in the nation, and the percentage of people vaccinated in Mobile county is among the lowest in the state (34% fully vaccinated in Mobile), and the University is presently unable to accurately determine the vaccination rate of its students, faculty and staff; and,

WHEREAS both the CDC and the Alabama Department of Health have placed the entire state of Alabama in its highest risk category for the spread of COVID-19; and,

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Delta Variant: What We Know About the Science.](#)

WHEREAS at the time of this writing, there were “negative 29” reported ICU hospital beds in the state of Alabama as a result of a massive wave of COVID-19 patients that threaten to overwhelm Alabama hospitals in the next few weeks, according to infectious disease experts at UAB<sup>2</sup>; and,

WHEREAS “critical mass level zero” has been called multiple times over the last two weeks, indicating that there was no ambulance service available for 911 calls in Mobile County as a result of the pandemic; and,

WHEREAS the University of South Alabama just reported a 25% positivity rate of COVID-19 tests conducted by Student Health for students with symptoms as well as the highest weekly (8/14-8/20) number of new confirmed cases (84) of COVID among faculty, students and staff since the COVID-19 pandemic began; and,

WHEREAS CDC guidance for “Institutes of Higher Education Where not Everyone is Fully Vaccinated<sup>3</sup>” (updated July 23, 2021) calls for physical distancing of at least 6 feet in classrooms and the consistent and correct use of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19; and,

WHEREAS the Delta variant is transmissible by vaccinated individuals; and,

WHEREAS instructors at South are not currently notified by the university when their students test positive for COVID-19, but rather by a system that relies on self-reporting from infected individuals; and,

WHEREAS no vaccine has been approved for children under 12 years of age, and many faculty, staff and students live with children in that age group; and,

WHEREAS many faculty, staff and students fall into high risk categories for severe illness from COVID-19 or live with others in high risk categories; and,

WHEREAS, the F.D.A. has granted full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid Vaccine for people 16 and older<sup>4</sup>; and,

WHEREAS, the University of South Alabama is the premiere research and medical university in the region with a strong commitment to scientific principles and practices and a duty to make policy decisions informed by scientific evidence, appropriate and timely data, and the ethical standards of medical science; and,

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<sup>2</sup> WBRC. [Growing Concerns That Alabama Hospitals Will Be Overwhelmed with COVID Patients.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education.](#)

<sup>4</sup> NPR. [Pfizer-BioNTech’s COVID Vaccine Gets Full Approval from the FDA.](#)

WHEREAS the University of South Alabama has an obligation to protect the health and well-being of its faculty, students, staff and surrounding communities; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate urges the administration of the University of South Alabama to revise their current policies and adopt additional safety measures including or similar to the following:

- (1) adherence to current CDC “Guidance for Institutes of Higher Education” regarding social distancing and universal masking
- (2) reasonable accommodation in the form of instructor choice in determining course and/or class delivery modes based on individual instructor and student circumstances until the dangers associated with the current COVID-19 health crisis substantially decrease
- (3) inclusion of at least one faculty representative (approved by faculty senate) on all committees, groups, or task forces related to COVID-19 plans and policies (particularly on the University Committee for Reopening Campus where faculty are not currently represented)
- (4) email updates (twice weekly and immediately following any changes to policy and procedures) that clarify how and why COVID-19 related policy decisions are being made that impact the university community
- (5) adoption of a university-monitored system that promptly notifies instructors of COVID-19 infected or exposed students in their classroom to ensure appropriate quarantine measures
- (6) mandatory weekly COVID-19 testing for faculty, students and staff who do not volunteer proof of full vaccination as determined by current CDC recommendations
- (7) the immediate pursuit, and reporting, of any and all legislative, judicial, and lobbying efforts necessary to require COVID-19 vaccines of medically eligible University of South Alabama students, faculty, and staff following the precedent of other required FDA approved vaccines

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate applauds the University’s continuing efforts to make the Covid-19 vaccination quickly and conveniently available to all students, faculty, and staff.

Approved by USA Faculty Senate August 25, 2021