

A Resolution to Protect the Health, Safety and Well-Being of the University of South Carolina Community

*Passed by the Faculty Senate August 11, 2021*

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate recognizes strong faculty concerns over the health, safety and well-being of all students, staff and faculty, specifically as it relates to low vaccination rates, the rise of the Delta variant, and the need to stem the rising spread of COVID-19 throughout our community; and,

WHEREAS, vaccination rates in South Carolina are among the lowest in the United States, with only 45 percent of eligible South Carolinians fully vaccinated by August 4, 2021, according to the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC); and,

WHEREAS, vaccination rates in South Carolina among young adults have been particularly low, with only 36.8% (103,152 out of 281,714) of South Carolinians aged 20-24 years having received at least one dose of the vaccine as of August 9, 2021, according to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC); and,

WHEREAS, Richland County in South Carolina is experiencing a surge in the Delta variant, with a high level of transmission and the highest rates since February 2021; and,

WHEREAS, children under 12 years of age are currently not able to receive any of the vaccinations and the recent surge in COVID-19 cases and other respiratory illnesses is resulting in pediatric intensive care units at Prisma Health Children's Hospital in Columbia being at capacity; and,

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognizes airborne transmission of the virus and recommends improved ventilation and airborne mitigation efforts; and,

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) recommend all persons ages 2 and older wear face coverings indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to reduce the spread of the virus that causes the disease COVID-19; and,

WHEREAS, the Delta variant is more transmissible than previous variants of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, such that fully vaccinated individuals are contracting the Delta variant and spreading it; and,

WHEREAS, many students, faculty, and staff have underlying medical conditions or have repeated close contact with those who do, and immunocompromised individuals may not be as well-protected by the vaccine; and,

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend testing of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals; and,

WHEREAS, Columbia-area hospitals (Prisma Health and Lexington Medical Center) are limiting visitors due to the current surge of the Delta variant; and,

WHEREAS, all students, faculty, and staff are entitled to a safe learning and work environment; and,

WHEREAS, the Carolinian Creed, an expression of our common values at the University of South Carolina, pledges us to, “demonstrate concern for others, their feelings, and their need for the conditions which support their work and development”; and,

WHEREAS, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools’ standard 13.8, establishes an institution’s “ethical responsibility” to, “take reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community”; and,

WHEREAS, the Fall 2021 class schedule was activated on March 5, 2021, before the budget proviso was ratified on June 25, 2021 and before the Delta variant surge in South Carolina in August 2021; and,

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly the rise of the Delta variant, presents a constantly changing situation in which it may be advisable to authorize shifts in course modalities in Fall 2021; and,

WHEREAS, changes in course modality require approval of the Faculty Senate;

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that in the interest of the health, safety and well-being of all students, faculty, and staff:

1. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages the University Administration to implement CDC protocols on COVID-19 and, in the future, to adjust its safety protocols as necessary to comply with any changes in CDC guidelines.
2. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to implement the following mask mandate for all vaccinated and unvaccinated members of the University community, with limited exceptions allowed for documented health reasons and until changes in CDC guidelines and a reasonable assessment of the likely impact on public health suggest it is no longer advisable:

“Effective immediately, the University of South Carolina requires face coverings to be worn at all times inside all campus buildings, unless you are in your own residence hall room, private office or you are actively eating or drinking inside campus dining facilities. There is no requirement to wear a face covering outdoors.”

3. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to implement a mandatory weekly testing regime for all students, staff, and instructors, regardless of vaccination status, until changes in CDC guidelines and a reasonable assessment of the likely impact on public health suggest it is no longer advisable.
4. In the absence of the mask mandate encouraged in Item 2, the Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to allow faculty and instructors to require fully masked classrooms and interactions with students outside of the classroom.
5. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages University Administration to, in consultation with the appropriate committees of the Faculty Senate, develop and authorize reasonable accommodations to safeguard the health of faculty and instructors, including but not limited to modified duties, section changes, rescheduling individual Fall 2021 courses to Spring 2022, and changes in course modality. Key factors the University Administration should consider include the extent to which the University implements the protocols encouraged in Items 1-4, class size, University vaccination rates, and whether the faculty member or instructor or close contacts of the faculty member or instructor are medically unable to be vaccinated, as is currently the case with close contacts who are under the age of 12, or are immunocompromised.
6. The Faculty Senate grants approval, for Fall 2021, of any class modality change necessary to implement the accommodations contemplated in Item 5.
7. The Faculty Senate strongly encourages the University Administration to mitigate airborne transmission by adopting the following classroom protocols recommended by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Health Security: minimum MERV 13 HVAC filters; portable HEPA air filtration units in each classroom, and CO2 monitors in each classroom.