



FROM THE PROVOST

September 24, 2021

Good afternoon, Colleagues,

As cooler weather arrives and as we move into the heart of the semester, it appears the campus community has settled into a rhythm, and I appreciate all everyone is doing to give our students the best experience possible. We have a number of groups working to help plan for the spring semester and beyond, and while we are pleased the number of COVID cases on campus has dropped rapidly, we remain vigilant and mindful of the need to continue precautions. I want to share some updated information below about our efforts related to the pandemic.

Updates from OSU COVID Response Team: The system-wide COVID Response Team chaired by Dr. Johnny Stephens continues to meet at least once each week to address on-going health and safety issues and to review the latest case numbers. The following points from this week's discussion may be of interest:

- As reported on [COVID Dashboard](#), vaccination numbers for students, faculty, and staff continues to increase, which is very encouraging since research shows being vaccinated and wearing a mask offer the best defense for fighting off the virus. Additionally, our positivity rate has dropped to 2.76%, and the number of positive cases and students in quarantine has decreased. Similar trends can be seen at the state level. Yet, each of us knows of a family member and/or colleague who has battled COVID, so please do your part by continuing to encourage vaccinations and masking when indoors - - together we will successfully finish the fall semester!
- Booster shots also have been a topic for the Response Team, and teams at University Health Services and the Center for Health Sciences are ready to respond once parameters for roll-out of the Pfizer booster are confirmed. In the meantime, please consult your personal health care provider if a question arises.

Continued Guidance for Office Hours and Advising Appointments: Very early in the semester guidance was provided supporting the personal preference of faculty and advisors to continue to hold office and advising appointments in person or to shift to a virtual format if needed. This decision was made with the intent of monitoring input received and making a determination prior to October 1 on guidance for the remainder of the fall semester. During yesterday's briefing with the deans, it was shared the initial guidance was meeting the needs of students, as well as faculty and advisors. As such, it was agreed virtual options would continue with the parameters originally put in place (below) and with a reminder that spring enrollment will soon begin and students will likely need ready access to their advisors as course enrollments are finalized.

- We need to remain cognizant of the academic and mental health needs of our students as there will be instances when an in-person meeting is essential.
- The opportunity to shift office and advising appointments online, if preferred, should not be interpreted as permission to return to remote work locations, unless an approved EO accommodation or alternate work location agreement is in place.
- For those who plan to have office hours or advising appointments virtually, the previously shared statement quoted immediately below has been modified to reflect current guidance on mask wearing in the event a student requests an in-person appointment. Faculty and advisors are welcome to use this language when communicating with students. Additionally, faculty and advisors meeting students in person might consider relocating to a larger office or meeting space.

"Office hours and/or advising appointments for the remainder of the fall semester will be virtual; however, in-person appointments may be scheduled if essential. For in-person appointments, it is expected you will wear a mask, as social-distancing is not possible in my office. I also will be wearing a mask."

OSU Faculty Council Initiatives: Dr. Pamela Lovern, FC Chair, and I would like to thank all who took time to respond to the Faculty Council's survey "Faculty Viewpoints and Experiences Related to COVID-19". Input is being reviewed and an overview of comments will be shared at a later date.

- **Faculty Council's Equity Task Force** – The Faculty Council officers continue discussions on the formation of two additional advisory groups – a larger task force to facilitate an open dialogue among faculty to discuss COVID-19 related concerns and a new Faculty Council special committee. Please watch for an announcement early next week that will include information on nomination procedures. And, as a reminder, Dr. Lovern and I will be working together to identify a chair for the larger task force so if you are interested in serving in this role, please submit a brief statement to provost@okstate.edu by the close of business on Monday, Sept 27.

Fall General Faculty Meeting, Tuesday, Sept 28, 3:00 PM – As a reminder, the Fall General Faculty meeting will feature President Shrum as the speaker. The event will be held in-person at the recital hall of the McKnight Center and a virtual option will also be available. In addition to President Shrum's comments, Dr. Lovern will provide an overview of the proposed new Faculty Council advisor groups. I also anticipate Drs. Clarke and McCann will be available to respond to questions regarding the Pandemic/Endemic Planning Task Force. If you haven't already, please be sure to reserve this time on your calendar and plan to attend.

As we continue to stay the course, please know President Shrum, the Deans, and I recognize and appreciate your efforts to maintain your own health and emotional wellbeing, as well as the welfare of your colleagues and students.

Kindest regards,

Jeanette

Jeanette M. Mendez
Interim Provost and Senior Vice President