



FACULTY SENATE PROPOSAL FSP 2021-2022-01

I. **Proposal Name:**

CAMPUS SAFETY IN LIGHT OF THE COVID-19 CONTINUING PANDEMIC

II. **Proposal Statement:**

The UCO Faculty Senate proposes that UCO's Administration revise its Covid-19 Operational Policies and Procedures to help in mitigating the spread of Covid-19. This body respectfully requests that UCO's Administration take the lead and move toward actions which protect our community in the following ways:

- Encourage the wearing of masks through additional more robust campaigns and language such as "Masks are Expected."¹ This can help to get the message out to students, faculty, and staff that we believe that regardless of vaccination status, per the CDC's recommendations, we expect masks to be used on our campuses.
- Make PPE/Masks readily available on campus to students, faculty, and staff.
- In light of full FDA approval, we request that UCO requires COVID-19 vaccinations for all students, faculty, and staff unless medically exempt.² Governor Stitt's Executive Order 1:2021-16 prohibits such a mandate for admission into our buildings, but it does not specifically prohibit a mandate as a condition of enrollment or employment.³
- Increase access to testing, requiring a negative COVID-19 test result to return to class, and improve the reporting of positive COVID-19 cases.
- Implement mandatory quarantine periods and provide clarity in terms of procedures and enforcement of quarantines.
- Return to the Fall 2020 pandemic procedures (with the exception of masking) regarding social distancing, limiting classroom capacity, stocking and maintaining sanitizers, and frequent cleaning protocols in all classrooms.

¹ See University of Oklahoma's policies at <https://www.ou.edu/together/university-masking-policy>

² Office of the Commissioner of Health, "FDA Approves FIRST Covid-19 Vaccine," U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA, 23 Aug 2021), <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine>.

³ Oklahoma Administrative Code section 1:2021-16, <https://casetext.com/regulation/oklahoma-administrative-code/title-1-executive-orders/section-12021-16>

- Allow individual instructors the autonomy to determine the modality of instruction that best suits their situation and subject matter, with options for Online/Virtual instruction available to any instructor. This includes optimizing procedures for faculty, staff, and student accommodations.
- Go back to limiting the size of all gatherings on our campus. Large social gatherings go against the effort of creating a safe environment.

Background:

As third largest higher education institution in the state of Oklahoma, the University of Central Oklahoma has a proud history of working with the community for a stronger Oklahoma. The COVID-19 pandemic has been no exception. Faculty and Staff have worked in ways that were previously unanticipated to meet the needs of our students. In the past few weeks, the Delta variant has renewed our need to have clear and effective policies in place to keep our community safe. We write as representatives of the UCO Faculty Senate on behalf of the UCO Faculty and greater UCO community, to express concern regarding UCO’s approach to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Recently, the UCO COVID-19 task force provided guidelines for Faculty and Staff regarding self-reporting, contact tracing, and exposure, but these guidelines seemed to ignore the bigger picture of mitigating the spread of the virus in our classrooms. Members of the UCO community believes that we need to go further to create a safe and equitable environment for all who are on our campuses. As members of this community, we recognize the challenges inherent in navigating an issue that has been politicized, however, this body cannot overlook the need to take steps to further mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect our university community. If UCO fails to do so, we risk irreparable harm to student-faculty relationships, employee and student morale, and overall public health.

UCO’s vision statement purports to “provide our students the opportunities to achieve the full measure of their personal, professional, and civic potential.” By not addressing how to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our classrooms, we are putting our students and the greater community at risk, especially members of marginalized populations. These issues directly impact UCO’s ability to provide students the opportunities to achieve the full measure of their potential in the following ways:

- COVID-19 disproportionately affects marginalized communities.⁴ UCO has a significant and growing population of first generation students, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous people, as well as those with limited resources for dealing with the impacts of exposure or a positive case within their households. Since requiring masks is not allowed under current Oklahoma law⁵, other mitigation strategies are essential to help slow the spread of the virus into our communities – particularly those marginalized populations.

⁴ “Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 29 April 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

⁵ Oklahoma Administrative Code section 1:2021-16, <https://casetext.com/regulation/oklahoma-administrative-code/title-1-executive-orders/section-12021-16>

- While we realize that requiring masks of our students is not allowed under Oklahoma law⁶, we do believe that taking other measures like to slow the spread are essential to protect everyone on our campuses. As an examples:
 - The UCO Faculty and staff are no longer are provided sanitation wipes to sanitize workspaces and classrooms.
 - The plexi-glass panels previously installed for our protection have either been removed or have fallen down.
 - The computer video systems we spent resources on last year to teach virtually sit unused.

Each of these were hearty approaches that helped us get through last fall without closing while other higher education institutions were not so fortunate.

- Non-tenure track, contingent, and untenured faculty members teach in higher quantity/more heavily populated classrooms and therefore are at increased risk for exposure. These faculty members are less likely to seek accommodations due to the tenuous nature of their employment.⁷ In fact, in a year following and proceeding (assumed) faculty position cuts, most faculty are not willing to be vocal for fear that it would place their positions at further risk their jobs while essentially risking their lives by being potentially exposed to the deadly virus.

Each day that UCO does not address these concerns, COVID-19 spreads within our community. At UCO our Faculty and Staff have proven their dedication and commitment to students over the past year in working in ways we had never anticipated to assure student learning; however, we need the support of UCO's Administration. Without providing the foregoing, UCO Administration is risking our lives, our livelihood, and our university's future by alienating students, potential future students, and families who are fearful in returning to classrooms which are not safe, and creating a perception across the metro that we simply are not being the best stewards of higher education.

This Resolution was submitted for Consideration to the UCO Faculty Senate on 30 August 2021.

⁶ Oklahoma Administrative Code section 1:2021-16, <https://casetext.com/regulation/oklahoma-administrative-code/title-1-executive-orders/section-12021-16>

⁷ See Rebecca Kelliher, "A Precarious, Unequal Tipping Point for Faculty," *Diverse*, 21 July 2021, <https://www.diverseeducation.com/faculty-staff/article/15109679/a-precarious-unequal-tipping-point-for-faculty> and "On the Verge of Burnout' COVID-19's Impact on Faculty Well-Being and Career Plans" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 2020), https://connect.chronicle.com/rs/931-EKA-218/images/Covid%26FacultyCareerPaths_Fidelity_ResearchBrief_v3%20%281%29.pdf.