



August 4, 2021

Katia Passerini, Ph.D.
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Dear Dr. Passerini,

We are writing to express concerns about the current state of planning for our return to campus in Fall 2021.

We have followed closely the updates provided by the Health Intervention and Communication Team. We welcome the most recent indication (email July 29, 2021) that the Team is willing to consider modifications to the existing plans, and we support the Faculty Senate's request for considerations of proof of vaccination and mask mandates.

At the same time, we are also informed of the publicly announced plans at various universities that include more rigorous protections of health and safety than what are currently in place at Seton Hall. (For reference, see, for example: Georgetown <https://www.georgetown.edu/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/>; Boston College <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/sites/bc-forward/updates/update-july-29-lochhead.html>; Villanova <https://www1.villanova.edu/content/university/student-life/messages/july-13-2021.html>; Montclair State <https://www.montclair.edu/redhawk-restart/policies-protocols/student-covid-19-vaccination-policy-for-fall-term-2021/>; and Rutgers <https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu/a-message-to-students-on-covid-19-vaccinations/>.)

We believe that instead of the recently announced 2-week campus mask mandate, we need a comprehensive plan to mitigate the spread of infection in Fall 2021 in place now.

While vaccines remain the best means to prevent infection and severe COVID-19, emerging reports indicate that in certain cases vaccinated people may be capable of spreading the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2. This poses a risk, which we can mitigate while teaching in-person, to people who cannot be vaccinated due to age (i.e. the children of SHU community members under the age of 12) or medical conditions. We believe that we need a return to campus that ensures the safety of all members of our community as well as of the families of staff, faculty and students.

We urge you to pursue a return to campus consistent with the following, developed with the help of Daniel Nichols, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Biology and Director of Graduate Studies, expert in virology:

1. Seton Hall University needs an enforceable vaccine requirement. Anonymous surveys are not accurate and can be misrepresented. Proof of vaccination status should be collected confidentially to determine the percentage of vaccinated adults at Seton Hall University. As of now, uploading vaccination documents by students is not required and is done on a volunteer basis. Knowledge of how many community members remain unvaccinated should guide additional measures to mitigate transmission, including masking and potentially reduction of density in classrooms in courses where a large population of unvaccinated students are present.

2. Indoor Masking Mandates should be reinstated at Seton Hall University regardless of vaccine status for the Fall 2021. Students, faculty and staff should be required to wear masks indoors for several reasons.

a. The United States has failed to reach the 70% benchmark for vaccination. As a result, we are a long way from achieving herd immunity. Given the quasispecies nature of coronaviruses, low vaccination rates create an ideal environment in which to select for variants that are more transmissible and capable of causing breakthrough infections. As highlighted in latest CDC guidelines, masking vaccinated as well as non-vaccinated persons can help us further reduce the risk of transmission.

b. Many faculty and staff have young children at home who are not yet eligible to receive the vaccines. Given that the Delta variant is causing increasing symptomatic cases in young children and that in certain cases, vaccinated individuals may spread the new variants, mask mandates are necessary to further reduce the risk of transmission from SHU employees to their children.

c. Many classrooms, large and small, lack proper ventilation. Simply changing the filters does not go far enough to prevent spread without also measuring the volume of air cycled in each class. Large lecture halls present a substantial risk of transmission in confined spaces. Biology, Physics, Chemistry, and Psychology for example have class sizes ranging from 120 to-nearly 200 students in the fall. If 14.3% of that population is not planning to get vaccinated, that means between 17 and 29 students in each section are at significant risk of contracting and transmitting the virus. Faculty have no way of forcing unvaccinated students to wear a mask; therefore, all students should wear a mask in the lecture halls. Masking combined with vaccination will help reduce the risk.

3. Faculty, staff, and students who have received an exemption from the vaccination requirement should be regularly tested on campus. Catching the asymptomatic cases through regular screening will reduce the risk of on-campus transmission and provide further incentive to get vaccinated.

4. Faculty need to be informed if there are COVID-19 positive students in their classroom. Last year, many of us came in contact with COVID-19 positive cases and received no notification from the University's contact tracing. In several cases, students self-identified to their instructors, but had they not, we would have been unaware of

potential exposure. We need rigorous contact tracing that includes faculty so that they can assess their own personal risks and take necessary steps to avoid spreading the virus to vulnerable members of their family.

Furthermore, we ask the administration to provide an update about the status of student accommodations for remote learning.

Sincerely,
SHU AAUP Advocacy Chapter

cc: Dr. Joseph Nyre, President
cc: Matthew Borowick, Vice President of University Relations
Shawna Cooper-Gibson, Vice President of Student Services