

Petition to Modify COVID-19 Safety Protocols in the University of Alabama System

July 19, 2021

Whereas contracting COVID-19 risks serious short- and long-term harms—both to oneself and, via subsequent transmission, to the community—including long-term psychological, neurological, cardiovascular, and pulmonary harms;¹

Whereas only 34% of Alabamians are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, as of July 19, 2021;

Whereas even in several countries with more highly vaccinated populations than Alabama (such as the U.K. and Israel), daily COVID-19 cases are surging due to the Delta variant. Since May 19, 2021, new cases have increased 2300% in the U.K. and 2800% in Israel. Closer to home, since June 3, 2021, daily cases have increased 630% in Arkansas, 390% in Missouri, and 260% in Louisiana. Since July 3, 2021, daily cases in Alabama have increased 300%;² and

Whereas the state of Alabama prohibits University of Alabama (UA) System schools from requiring that their students be vaccinated against COVID-19, and also prohibits them from verifying student vaccination status;³

Whereas the UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan states that “All [and only] unvaccinated faculty, staff, and students are required to wear face coverings inside all University buildings,”⁴ even though, with no legal way of verifying community members’ vaccination status, such a protocol is unenforceable;

Whereas the UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan requires “at least three-foot circumferential distance, regardless of space size, between individuals not from the same household ... in all university facilities whenever possible,”⁵ and the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) claims that this requirement “is consistent with revised Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] considerations for operating schools during COVID-19,”⁶ even though current CDC guidance restricts the “3 feet” social distancing recommendation to fully vaccinated or masked K-12 students,⁷ and recommends that unvaccinated adults wear masks and “stay 6 feet away” from people who do not live in their household;⁸

Whereas the UA System requires all regular faculty and staff to return to campus workspaces for the 2021-2022 academic year (with few exceptions), and the UAH administration has ordered some faculty, against their best judgment, to teach in person;

Therefore, the undersigned faculty and staff urge the administrators of the UA System to:

1. Require mask use of all persons inside classrooms and all university facilities (with few exceptions);
2. Require six feet of distance between all persons inside classrooms and all university facilities (with few exceptions); and
3. Permit any faculty and staff who are concerned about the safety of returning to campus workspaces to (a) work remotely or (b) take unpaid leaves of absence.

July 22, 2021 Postscript: This petition was distributed for signatures on July 19, 2021. On July 20, 2021, the UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan was revised.

The revised plan is *less* protective than the plan described above: it eliminates the universal "3 feet" social distancing policy and replaces it with an unenforceable honor system of "3 feet" of social distancing for the unvaccinated only.

In response to this revision, we again urge the administrators of the UA System to require six feet of distance between all persons inside classrooms and all university facilities (with few exceptions).

August 16, 2021 Postscript: On August 9, 2021, UAH implemented a mandatory and universal indoor mask mandate, thereby satisfying the first of this petition's three demands. We applaud UAH for enacting this policy.

However, we continue to urge UAH to adopt universal social distancing indoors and to permit faculty, staff, and researchers to teach and work online (or choose to take unpaid leave).

UAH Signatories

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Distinguished Professor, Psychology
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¹ “Post-COVID Conditions,” updated July 12, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects.html>.

² “Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count,” updated and accessed on July 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>.

³ SB267, signed into law on May 24, 2021, <https://legiscan.com/AL/bill/SB267/2021>.

⁴ “Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan,” updated May 21, 2021, accessed on July 19, 2021, <https://uasystem.edu/covid-19/plan>.

⁵ “Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan,” updated May 21, 2021, accessed on July 19, 2021, <https://uasystem.edu/covid-19/plan>.

⁶ “Campus Update: Update to UAH COVID-19 Health and Safety Requirements,” April 7, 2021, accessed on July 19, 2021, <https://www.uah.edu/covid-19/campus-updates/16221-campus-update-update-to-uah-covid-19-health-and-safety-requirements>.

⁷ “Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools,” updated July 9, 2021, accessed on July 19, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.

⁸ “Guidance For Unvaccinated People: How to Protect Yourself & Others,” updated June 11, 2021, accessed on July 19, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>.