Faculty and Staff Mask Concerns

Note: This survey was conducted by the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate. The survey was initially distributed on Friday Sept 9, 2022, before the Senate meeting.

**Survey Prompt.**

Recently President Sams announced a change in the mask policy. Old Westbury is now "mask optional" in classrooms at the discretion of the instructor, while other spaces such as health care facilities and busses require masks. Individuals experiencing symptoms must wear a mask and isolate if they test positive. The full mask policy is available at

https://www.oldwestbury.edu/covid  
The deadline for this form is WED SEPT 14.

Please explain in detail any of your concerns about the mask policy.

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| None. We are an institution of science and as such, should be supporting the institutions relying on scientific data (e.g. CDC), and not contributing to the eroding of trust in science citizens already have by contradicting the guidelines. |
| Current policy is appropriate. My students feel relax and agree with policy. It seems to me the community is pleased with this optional behavior. |
| I am not a medical person, but masks significantly inhibit instruction. Instruction is personal and will be different for each faculty member. I am sure some faculty can teach well with a mask, but I cannot. In my classroom I need to have the authority to decide what is best for my instruction. Of course, I will always follow safety guidelines when they are mandated and necessary. If I need to mandate masks at any point due to concerns inside my classroom, I appreciate the code of conduct violation can be a recourse if students are argumentative about any masking situation (hopefully not necessary). |
| I agree with the President, given the vaccination status of the population, the current availability of medicines, and the experience of health workers (nurses, doctors, etc) acquired during the past two years there is no reason to enforce masks wearing |
| I'm delighted we finally caught up with the rest of the world on the reality that COVID is here to stay and wide spread masking is no longer necessary. In my opinion the policy should have been changed when p-12 changed theirs so this was long over due. |
| No concerns. It may be an unpopular opinion, but it has been an absolute pleasure to teach again without a mask and to be able to see my students' faces. Teaching with a mask on was so difficult; I was often quite out of breath when speaking and would have to pull the mask away from my face to get air. It also fogged my glasses. More concerningly, with the masks, I felt a barrier between myself and my students. I could not see their faces, remember their names, often I could not tell who was speaking. It was awful. It has been a wonderful return to normalcy without the masks. Students who still want to wear them seem comfortable doing so. The new strain of Covid is not life-threatening to those who are vaccinated, as most of our campus community is. Thank you for making masking optional in the classroom. |
| It is not enforceable by administration, faculty, or staff so it should not longer be a requirement. If any individual wants to wear a mask that is their prerogative but that individual view should not infringe upon the rights or freedoms of other individuals. Other schools have ended their mask mandate as should OW. |
| People who are immuno-compromised or have medical conditions that make them susceptible to complications if getting Covid-19 need to be protected. In addition, some people might not directly concerned but others in their family/household might be. It is therefore very important that people around keep wearing masks when in the classroom or other closed spaces. In addition if the policy being "mask optional" it is difficult for individual instructors or any other individual staff members to enforce a mask wearing policy. |
| I have no concerns. |
| I think the mask policy is ridiculous. Masks do not prevent infection. If the faculty members want to wear a mask that is fine, but students should not be forced. I do not make students wear a mask in my class. Masks are optional but cleaning the bathrooms and picking up garbage also seem to be optional. Having a clean campus and clean areas would be more preventative than masks. |
| Having a meeting with people without wearing masks. I don't feel comfortable holding in-person office hours with students. Students getting inconsistent messages (e.g., flyer saying masks are strongly encouraged indoor versus campus policy saying masks are not required in classrooms, one instructor requires wearing mask versus another instructor doesn't.) |
| I'd be okay with mask mandates as long as they were enforced. No action was taken when masks were not worn by students or faculty in classrooms. |
| "Mask optional" in effect means no more masking. This is problematic for many who are vulnerable including myself. |
| No concerns at all. Masks should be optional and I opt not to wear one. Thanks. |
| The mask policy was always a joke and never enforced. We know of unvaccinated faculty that wore their masks selectively and endangered all of us. When we complained nothing came of it.  Also, when the masking rules email was written certain areas were not specified so 'etc' was interpreted as not my area. Every area should have been specified and should be in the future. |
| None. The policy is appropriate. |
| Masks do NOTHING to prevent disease transmission, therefore they should not be required for anyone to wear! We have all basically gotten this "virus" already whether vaccinated or not, so it is pointless. There are HUNDREDS of studies proving this point, but have all been suppressed in mainstream news outlets and social media. It is time to end ALL this covid nonsense, testing included. Medical segregation is wrong and goes against our mission. How about we get better custodial staff to upkeep the bathrooms? That is how to prevent spread of any disease or illness. Enough is enough! |
| Many of us are immuno compromised indoor spaces masks should be mandatory |
| I am in favor of a mask optional especially with a vaccine mandate in place. If anyone feels strongly about wearing a mask, they should wear one. We have learned a lot about COVID since early 2020 and have various treatments available now. |
| I'm very happy with the new mask-optional policy. I was very much not looking forward to teaching again wearing a mask. One does what one has to do, but weighing the costs and benefits, I think we need to prioritize getting the College back to normal. By the end of August, OW was very much an outlier among schools in maintaining a mask mandate and was one of the very few places I was ever wearing a mask. |
| I've already had some COVID-positive students in week 1. With winter coming, it will get worse. And students will feel differently about some faculty than others if a policy is not universal. It could hurt folks who are not tenured to maintain safe protocols. |
| It's not a concern for me to wear the mask, except while lecturing in the classroom. |
| I am grateful that faculty are still allowed to require masks in their classrooms, but I have continued concerns about the lack of masks/mask optional status in indoor spaces on campus. COVID-19 is still very much a concern and numbers will only continue to rise as the weather gets colder, as has been shown in previous years. Personally, I have a chronic respiratory condition that puts me at increased risk for respiratory infection and severe damage from such infections. I also live with three people who are over 75 years of age and have chronic respiratory and/or heart conditions; one of whom is over 90 years old and currently undergoing chemotherapy. I live in constant fear that I will become infected on campus and bring COVID home to one of them. I am unable to fully focus on my teaching or my work, because of resulting hypervigilance to the unmasked state of the people around me, and it is beginning to take a severe toll on both my physical and mental health. I realize that people have complained that they are uncomfortable wearing masks, but what is a little discomfort compared to the potential loss of life of us and our loved ones? Even long COVID has been proven to be potential fatal or chronically debilitating. Why on Earth are we taking this risk? As a medical doctor, as well as a teacher, this makes absolutely no sense to me. Thank you for your time and consideration, and for at least allowing me to continue to feel a modicum of safety in my own classroom. |
| I think it should be mandated in all classrooms. |
| I have 4 main concerns: 1. The people who are most affected by the mask-optional policy are those who have a lot to lose. We are members of the disabled community or have loved ones who are, and COVID is continuing to kill and incapacitate us at an alarming rate (even the CDC agrees), even those of us who are vaxed. The disabled community is at least 20% of the general population - we are already marginalized in so many ways - to drop the mask policy means jeopardizing the lives of many on campus. I no longer feel supported by a campus that had long upheld a social justice mission where we came together to support each other as members of an interdependent community - where disabled people were respected and welcomed as part of the diverse communities on campus.  2. Wearing masks is not 100% protection from covid - and the risk is greater in indoor environments where most people are maskless. This makes it so that the disabled population must isolate even more - and decreases the diversity of the campus, and negatively impacts the campus's social justice mission.  3. To hold meetings that we have to be at or would like to be at but that are mask-optional without a Zoom option really signals a lack of care and disrespect for our safety and - literally - lives. This creates a segregated culture- those who can congregate safely without masks and those for whom an indoor environment where people aren't wearing masks could cost loss of health or life. To ensure we all have equal access to meetings, all campus meetings should either be mask-mandatory or include a Zoom option - this includes Provost's Council.  4. I appreciate that faculty members can require that students wear masks in their classrooms and will be supported by Student Code of Conduct. I would ask that the policy welcome staff members and others who work in offices to do the same. Staff members sit in one office space all day with many people coming in and out. They should get to require masks in their space if they wish - to make the work environment safe. |
| I am still wearing my mask all the time when I am indoors. I teach in three classrooms that don’t have windows and allow access to fresh air. I have requested that all of my students wear a mask in my classrooms. I do not think it is fair for faculty to be told they have to have F2F office hours after classes already started and schedules have been made, in which students sit in close proximity to us, while there is still a very contagious strain of Covid going around. While I understand the risk is currently medium, I already know of several faculty and staff who have or recently had Covid. |
| I have no concerns and feel that I am in a safe environment at SUNY OW. |
| I was happy to see that the President's Office finally changed the mask policy to "mask optional". I joked to friends and family over the summer that the only places left in the world that you were still required to wear a mask were healthcare facilities and SUNY Old Westbury. The CDC came out and stated that wearing a mask is a personal choice; therefore, why should we be forced to wear them? As I've walked through the halls over the first two weeks of school, I've barely seen any classrooms where students are required to wear masks. |
| Faculty may instruct students to wear a mask in their large classrooms but in my small office as a professional there was no language built into the policy about me being able to instruct a student to wear a mask while we are having a session. |
| None. At this point, there is no need to require masks as there are no masks required other places. |
| None. |
| 1) Announced at COB the day before the first day of classes, after all of my syllabi were uploaded to Brightspace and emailed to students, saying that the College had a policy of wearing masks 2) Devolving the decisionmaking to faculty for their classrooms means that faculty requiring masks have to bear brunt of any resentment and have to enforce |
| I have no concerns, I think this is the right decision |
| That the onus falls on faculty to encourage/require students to mask up in the classroom. And that the responsibility falls on staff to encourage/require folks to mask in communal spaces (including secretary workspaces that are in department offices). |
| My courses are all in a basement classroom, where there is very limited air circulation. Especially, as the winter seasons come closer, the closed door-window classroom is a big container of viruses. Therefore, I would advise students coming to in-person instructions wear masks, to protect themselves as well as others. |
| I presently do not have any concerns about the mask policy for me, personally. I have about 30% of my students continuing to wear masks. |
| None. |
| While the new mask-optional policy is likely not the safest and most-advised from a purely public health standpoint, it is broadly in line with current policies in most other public and private institutions across New York State and the US at this point. It is likely most in-line with what students, faculty and staff now expect and encounter in other areas of their daily lives. |
| Masks diminish covid spread. Having an inconsistent policy (masking in classrooms, but not in hallways) puts the onus on professors to enforce mask wearing. Students have cancer, students have auto-immune disorders, faculty have older parents, or younger, unvaccinated children. Faculty may themselves be immunocompromised. I am, and last spring I had two students who were undergoing chemotherapy. Everyone masked wonderfully--until we were told we didn't have to in the hallways.  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7561164/  It is unfortunate that our political leaders, and public health officials attached to governmental agencies have decided that laissez-faire is the way to go. Individual masking is inadequate--all parties must mask. Being welcomed to "you do you" is an insult to the gravity of the situation, and an insult to our status as an institution of higher learning.   Why would we as institution decide that it is ok to infect others? We still are unsure of the impacts of this mass-disabling event, but even those who are vaccinated are subject to long covid. We do not know the impacts of this--again, why subject ourselves to an illness, the contours of which are still largely unknown. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01453-0  Better safe than sorry. And masking requires leadership and a sense of community. We have learned in the last years that our nation lacks both. I appreciated that OW was an outlier. As with incarceration--our nation has 4% of the world's population, but an inordinately high percentage of the worlds deaths. Social justice begins at home, and is modeled by us--or not. |
| Ideally masks wd be required. I appreciate that faculty can require them but free masks to distribute wd be helpful. |
| I support it. |
| I agree with no masks in classrooms, but keeping masks on everywhere else. |
| I was most disturbed by the fact the policy was changed in the evening before the semester started. This short notice did not give students an opportunity to make informed choices and did not allow faculty to prepare. I heard some say it's a sneaky move by the College and I cannot deny that. |
| no concerns about the current mask policy. |
| My main concern is that this was announced on the evening before classes and put too much enforcement on individual faculty members with not notice or prep time. It also alarmed students who have situations that require them to be more cautious and were expecting to walk into fully masked classrooms. This timing gave faculty almost no time to think about concerns with students or to communicate their own guidelines to students. It gave us no time to communicate with our departments and schools to discuss best practices. It added an extra layer of tension to the 1st day of classes, forcing faculty to start the term with loaded debates about masks, when we should have been using that essential first week to build community and set the tone for a wonderful semester. I would have strongly preferred advanced warning earlier in Aug or a start of term announcement that the policy would be changed in mid or late Sept, to give us that time and space for a more thoughtful transition. Faculty were blind sided and, frankly, thrown under the bus by the timing and wording of this announcement/policy change. We are now forced to individually take on the heavy responsibility to make classroom policies that could endanger or protect students, staff and faculty (and their extended families) with immune compromised situations. We are also now put in the position of being targeted directly by those who are anti-mask, if we chose to require masks in our classrooms. This is a huge ethical responsibility, one I take very seriously, and I would have preferred to have more time to prepare and more institutional support as we move through this transition. |
| I think requiring masks should also be at the discretion of Professional Staff when having visitors to their offices. |
| No concerns. |
| The change shifted responsibility for policy from the institution to the individual (the professor, at least, as far as classrooms are concerned). Any students who object to wearing a mask therefore now have an individual standing in front of them towards whom they can direct their ire, rather than a nebulous authority. I, for one, don't want to get accosted by the sorts of people who are vocally against wearing masks, so I'd appreciate not being made into a potential target for them.  The policy was also announced the night before classes began, giving no notice for professors to inform students about the particular policy for their classroom. Instead, students heard "masks optional" and acted accordingly, so the momentum was against any person attempting to maintain masking in their classroom.  If a meeting had been held in which the conclusion was "we don't want to continue to face pushback from anti-masking students, but we also don't want to declare masking to be optional and piss off UUP" I don't think a more perfect solution could have been devised. On paper masking can still be required by professors, but the timing and nature of the announcement has made it effectively impossible to do. |
| I have no concerns about the mask policy as stated by Dr. Sams. I am glad that he made it clear that it was OPTIONAL and that those (faculty, staff, students) opting to choose to wear the mask and those opting NOT to should be free to follow their choices without pre-judgment of the reasons for choosing. We are in line with all the other SUNY's in this current policy, as far as I am aware. |
| As a staff member, I am very concerned about the "mask optional" change. Working in a office with high-foot traffic with those who are not masked increases the likelihood of variant transmission. Staff who are involved in unmasked meetings and gatherings puts those who are autoimmune compromised and/or unvaccinated at higher risk. Masking, at the very least, has demonstrated that it helps to decrease transmission and exposure for everyone. Signage should be expanded to include masking not just discretion of "instructor" but also "staff." |
| The new policy does not take into consideration the most vulnerable individuals in the classroom (faculty or student). This places anyone with an immunocompromised condition in a position of trying to protect themselves. I would assume this is disruptive to the learning process (or teaching process for faculty). |
| Not clear. No one seems to know when to wear a mask. |
| I support the mask-optional policy, My only concern is that too many faculty will complain and masks will become required. I find teaching in person to be much more effective when I am not masked and students are free to be unmasked as well. Required masks in classrooms are more than a "minor inconvenience" -- they have a negative impact on education and communication between faculty and students. Further, faculty should not have to serve as masking police, which is distracting when teaching, not to mention ineffective. |
| I am a little nervous about it, but I hated teaching while wearing the mask. I feel quite safe since I'm double boosted and presumably everyone is vaccinated. I'm aware that things may change and the students might not want to wear masks again. |
| I have no issue with the current policy. |
| Although being fully vaccinated and/or boosted reduces our chance of catching or spreading the coronavirus, it does not eliminate it entirely. If students are infected with the coronavirus and do not know it, a mask keeps their respiratory droplets and particles from infecting others. So, keep wearing mask is important for protecting ourselves and other people from getting COVID-19. |
| Currently I do not have any concern and I recommend students to wear mask but I do not impose. However, one of my grad students tested positive for Covid and he will be in quarantine for 5 days. Should I be worried about having more students with the same situation? |
| I understand that masks are required on buses and health facilities- what about the dining hall, restrooms, and indoor public spaces? I am not sure what the policy is regarding these places. |
| Because it's mask optional, most students don't wear masks and we're not in well-ventilated rooms. As someone who's gotten COVID twice in crowded rooms, I am concerned about getting COVID again and again. |
| It shifts all responsibility and enforcement on faculty. I am particularly concerned about our untenured colleagues that may fear that requiring masks in class will result in lowered scores on students’ “evaluations.” |
| I strongly favor masks optional. As an instructor, my teaching is inhibited by wearing a mask. With masks, students have a more difficult time understanding me and each other. Furthermore, it is unnecessarily burdensome to have to enforce anything but a masks optional policy.   If the college deems covid a concern, we should go to a fully remote model. |
| I like that freedoms are given to professors, but it also puts a lot of responsibility and potential conflict into their hands. |