

Update on Our Fall Semester Plans

August 18, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

As the fall semester approaches, welcome back to another school year on the Forty Acres. Clearly, we had all hoped that the launch of the year would have been very close to normal, but, as with many of our late summer and fall plans, things have become more complicated and stressful as the delta variant has spread throughout Austin and Texas.

In the face of this latest challenge, I am heartened by the way we persevered through last year and continued to teach our great students effectively and to conduct high-impact research. I'm also encouraged by the resilience I see each day on campus and the work so many of you are doing to support our returning students. I've spoken with faculty members this week who are both preparing to teach in person and making adjustments to reduce density in their classrooms. I've heard from staff members (many of whom have been on campus for months) who are readying the Forty Acres for the fall, checking in students, serving meals, and maintaining our beautiful grounds. I was even stopped this morning by some new students who were out on a scavenger hunt as part of their orientation. I thank you for everything you are doing and for your commitment to our University of Texas community.

As we communicated last week, we start the fall semester encouraging all community members to wear masks indoors, and we are continuing to offer [vaccines and regular COVID-19 testing](#). If you have not been vaccinated yet, now is the time, as it is our best tool to combat the virus.

In response to the recent increase of COVID-19 in Austin and across the state, we have amended our approach for the fall semester in several other ways:

Faculty can temporarily reduce classroom density between August 25 and September 17:

- All faculty members who are assigned in-person classes this fall have the option of teaching with a reduced classroom density, with a goal of providing each student with at least one in-person experience per week for each (in-person) course.
- Deans have the flexibility to make immediate decisions regarding acute situations in their colleges and schools, including approving a limited number of requests from faculty members for temporary changes to teaching modality.

Unit leaders who were planning to implement flexible work arrangements (FWA) at the start of the school year can now delay implementation until September 17 for non-student facing/non-direct student support personnel.

We encourage large events to be held outdoors whenever possible. If an event must stay indoors, please be mindful of our masking recommendation and consider a larger space to allow for social distancing.

We are increasing vaccination efforts and promotions among our students and broader community. Please be on the lookout for more information later this week.

All our guidelines and FAQ's about COVID-19 can be found at protect.utexas.edu.

As a community, we must be nimble, flexible and united in pursuing the educational and academic missions of a flagship university. Hearing from our health experts, we expect that conditions will soon improve, and working together, we will remain focused on providing our students with the safe, healthy and first-class residential college experience that we cherish and that they deserve.

And again, I thank you for your work and dedication to this university.

Hook 'em!

Jay Hartzell
President