UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Office of the President

Office of the President
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September 17, 2021

Dr. Cindy Hahamovitch, President of the Franklin College Faculty Senate
Dr. Janette R. Hill, President of the Mary Frances Early College of Education Senate

Dear Drs. Hahamovitch and Hill:

We are in receipt of the resolution jointly passed by the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate and the Mary Frances Early College of Education Faculty Senate. We appreciate the important concerns expressed by these faculty representatives, and we share your earnest desire to promote the health and well-being of our campus community.

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) has sole authority over its 26 member institutions, including the University of Georgia. We are legally obligated to follow the directives of the USG Board of Regents. As you are well aware, the USG does not allow its institutions to adopt mask or vaccine mandates.

We remain committed to doing everything within our power to protect the health, safety and well-being of our community. We are strongly encouraging vaccinations and the wearing of masks inside classrooms, providing both for free to the community; we are offering free testing to our faculty, staff and students; we have adopted rigorous cleaning and sanitizing protocols over the course of the pandemic; and we have improved ventilation and indoor air quality by increasing daily air exchanges in 5.1 million square feet of academic and research space and installing portable HEPA units in more than 50,000 square feet of classrooms, with another $7 million in targeted projects to be conducted this year. In addition, we continue to receive valuable counsel and leadership from our campus medical and public health experts on the Medical Oversight Task Force and Preventative Measures Advisory Board.

As you know from the most recent weekly update on the University Health Center's (UHC) website, COVID-19 cases at UGA have sharply declined, falling from 505 reported the previous week to 164 for the week of Sept. 6-12. Similarly, the positivity rate for surveillance testing dropped from 3.88% to 2.46% over the same period. The UHC has administered nearly 26,000 vaccines to date, with 2,000 of those being given since classes resumed. These vaccine figures do not account for the many faculty, staff and students who have been vaccinated by their private health providers or in other locations off-campus.

More than 21,000 individuals registered for this week's first vaccine incentive drawing of $1,000. Over the course of the pandemic, we have urged our faculty, staff and students to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and have incentivized this action with gift cards, T-shirts and monetary drawings. We are pleased with the response and will continue to heavily promote vaccinations, as they offer our best line of defense.

In your letter and in the resolution, you call upon the University to reopen public COVID-19 testing. This testing has never ceased to be offered, although it moved to the University Health Center at the end of the spring semester. Asymptomatic testing is provided free of charge to our faculty, staff and students in an area that is separated from the area where symptomatic testing is being conducted. Students who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 have always needed to go to the University Health Center for testing and treatment by onsite medical providers, as is appropriate.

The University Health Center and Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories have the capacity to handle up to 800 surveillance tests per day and have been offering a weekly pop-up clinic for the past two weeks at the Tate Student Center. Demand has yet to come close to that level, but our staff members stand ready to expand capacity, if needed. It is worth noting that, unlike last fall when testing numbers were higher, we now have safe and effective vaccines. Our UHC providers must manage their time between administering tests and administering vaccines for COVID-19 and the flu, as well as their usual treatment of student health needs.

We appreciate and understand your position, but the USG does not allow its institutions to enact mask or vaccine mandates, nor for individual faculty members to change the modality of their delivery of instruction without following the protocols developed by the USG. Any questions regarding those policies should be directed to Acting Chancellor Teresa MacCartney and Board of Regents Chair Sachin Shailendra.

Sincerely,

Jere W. Morehead
President

Alan T. Dorsey
Dean, Franklin College of Arts and Sciences

Denise A. Spangler
Dean, Mary Frances Early College of Education

cc: Dr. Barbara A. Biesecker, Chair, University Council Executive Committee
Ms. Sherry Gray, Administrative Specialist II, Franklin College