

## Frequently Asked Questions about UT's Instructional Continuity Plan College of Natural and Health Sciences

The emergence of the Delta Variant of the Coronavirus and the subsequent increase in COVID-19 cases has led to changes and updates to our current Spartan Shield Health Safety Plan. It has also led to an increase in questions about how we will teach and manage our classes through the fall 2021 semester. **This document is an attempt to answer the most common or frequently asked questions.** The primary reference used is the updated Spartan Shield plan that is on our website at: [https://www.ut.edu/uploadedFiles/University\\_Services/COVID-19-Health-Safety-Task-Force-Report.pdf](https://www.ut.edu/uploadedFiles/University_Services/COVID-19-Health-Safety-Task-Force-Report.pdf)

The Spartan Shield plan is a living document that has been updated several times throughout the pandemic, and undoubtedly will change again as conditions warrant. Please check back to the website periodically as things may change.

Most of the common questions received fall into 4 categories: (1) Faculty and student remote teaching/learning accommodations; (2) Behavior in the Classroom; (3) Utilization of Zoom and other technologies; and (4) the issue of masking in the classroom. If, after reviewing the Spartan Shield Plan and this FAQ, your question is still unanswered, please feel free to contact the Dean's office and we will try to identify the answer.

### **1. Faculty and Student Remote Accommodations:**

A remote accommodation is a formal declaration that permits a student to enroll in their class for the semester as a "remote student;" or a faculty member to teach their classes remotely for the semester. The current Spartan Shield plan states, "**Neither faculty nor students shall have accommodations to teach or learn remotely.**" If you recall last year, all such accommodations were granted at the university level; not at the college level and certainly not at the department level. Accordingly, if a student requests a remote accommodation, all faculty should be clear that they do not have the authority to grant such accommodations. A few students and parents have already made such requests, and to the best of my knowledge, all such requests have been denied.

**The best thing that a student or faculty member can do to protect themselves is to be fully vaccinated and wear a mask when they are among others.** During the first week or so of the semester, the university has planned for free transportation to and from the local Walmart to receive a free vaccination in the event students came to campus unvaccinated.

### **2. Behavior and actions in the Classroom?**

**Florida Senate Bill 2006** prohibits the university from requiring students to be vaccinated or show proof of their vaccination status. The bill does not prohibit faculty members from asking students a wide variety of questions.

**Q. So Can I ask my students if they are vaccinated?**

I suppose you can, but the student is neither required to answer your question nor required to show you proof of their vaccination status. There is evidence from our community surveillance that the majority of our students are vaccinated, which is a bit comforting, but you cannot require them to show you documentation of their status. There are some exceptions to this for students doing clinical work in health care facilities that require vaccinations.

**Q. Will I have to maintain a seating chart?**

To facilitate contact tracing in the event of exposure in a classroom, faculty are asked to keep a seating chart of students. This is even more important as we will not be physically distanced in the classroom. However, we recognize this may not be possible in all cases, but where it is possible it will be very helpful in making contact tracing as quick and efficient as it can be.

**Q. What if a student refuses to sit where I ask them to?**

Because we are asking faculty to use a seating chart (where possible), it will be useless if students do not sit in their assigned seat. Therefore, if a faculty member has assigned seats and a student refuses to sit in their assigned seat, it will be considered a violation of our class disruption policy and students will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

**Q. What if a student refuses to wear a mask in the classroom?**

All students must comply with the current indoor mask policy. Any violation in the classroom will be considered a violation of the class disruption policy and the student will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. After reminding the student to wear their mask, do not hesitate to contact our Campus Safety Office to remove any student who refuses to comply or leave the classroom.

(Some students may state that they cannot wear a mask for some reason. Any student who requires an accommodation for a disability should submit a formal request to Student Disability Services. Information about Student Disability Services can be found on our website at: <https://www.ut.edu/academics/academic-support/academic-excellence-programs/student-disability-services>.)

**3. The Use of Zoom and other Technologies:**

While all regular instruction will be in a face-to-face, fully in-person format, it does not mean that Zoom and other remote technologies have disappeared. Faculty are free to use a variety of technology tools (including Zoom) to enhance their instruction; but the mode of instruction is fully in-person. Faculty are certainly free to hold their office hours via Zoom to clarify or answer a variety of questions that students may have regarding class material. Similarly, faculty will be expected to use Blackboard and can upload numerous resources to the Blackboard course site to supplement their in-person instruction.

**Q. What if a student is Covid-positive or quarantined; can or should I allow them to Zoom the class?**

First and foremost, if a student informs you that they are Covid-positive, they must immediately contact Rapid-Trace. Rapid-Trace will determine if, and how long the student will need to be in isolation. As already noted, Zoom is not going away, and no one is going to tell you that you cannot use Zoom for a student who is quarantined; however, I would advise against it. Students have been getting sick for as long as we have been teaching and with our current technology, there are more strategies than ever to assist a student who is away from the class to keep up. Faculty can provide a variety of resources on Blackboard, including their PowerPoints, class notes, and even recorded lectures, to assist students who are away from the class. But the use of all these technologies (including Zoom) will not substitute for your in-person, face-to-face instruction. You are still expected to meet your scheduled classes in-person and face-to-face. So think carefully how you may wish to assist students who are in quarantine. As previously noted, using Zoom during your office hours can help students a great deal, without you having to simultaneously manage an in-person class and a virtual class.

**Q. What if the instructor is Covid-positive or needs to quarantine? What then?**

If a faculty member becomes Covid-positive or believes they have had a significant close exposure, they must immediately contact Human Resources. Spartan Shield recommends a COVID-19 test in 3-5 days from first exposure, followed by quarantine if positive. Similar to what is noted above, it is quite common for faculty to have to be away from the classroom for a wide variety of reasons during a semester. These can include attending academic conferences, as well as illnesses; and for years, faculty members have assisted their students in their continuity of learning while they are gone. Again, there are no policies prohibiting you from Zooming your classes if you are ill or in quarantine but think twice about doing so.

#### **4. UT's Indoor Masking Policy**

The current masking policy went into effect on August 16 and will remain in effect until further notice. Remember that just a month ago many of us felt comfortable with a policy that stated if you are vaccinated, a mask is no long needed. This just reminds us that things change and at times, they can change quickly. Whether the masking policy will remain in effect for the entire semester is unclear, however, it is in effect until further notice. Accordingly, here are some questions received regarding our masking policy.

**Q. Do I have to wear a mask in my office or is that space considered a private room?**

If you are alone in your office, you do not have to wear a mask; however, if a colleague or student comes into your office, please wear the mask.

**Q. The mask policy states that if there is sufficient distance and I am teaching from the podium I can remove my mask. Is that correct, and what is sufficient distance?**

The policy does not state a specific distance. Some lecture spaces have plexiglass, while others don't. Some teaching spaces are varying distances from the first row of students, so we are asking faculty to use their judgment. Yes, if you wish, you can remove your mask when

lecturing from the podium/teaching station. With that said, I would encourage all faculty to keep their masks on when lecturing. We are requiring all students to keep their masks on; it is reinforcing for you to model that very behavior.

**Q. If later in the semester UT determines that it can end the indoor mask policy, can I continue to require my students to wear their masks in my class regardless?**

No. While all faculty have the ability to create class policies that make sense to them, faculty cannot establish class policies that directly violate university policies. It would be no different than a faculty member wanting a class policy that required students to remove their masks in their classroom in spite of the university's indoor mask policy.