

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** URI Faculty, Department Chairs, and Deans  
**FROM:** Donald H. DeHayes, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Laura Beauvais, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Designate  
**DATE:** September 8, 2021  
**SUBJ:** 2021-2022 Academic Year

Welcome to the 2021-22 academic year. After more than 20 months of dislocation and isolation from campus and each other, we are pleased and excited to welcome faculty, students, and staff back to campus. To most of our new faculty hired in recent years, we are especially pleased that you will finally have an opportunity to connect with your faculty colleagues on campus and get to meet our students in person.

While we know many students and faculty are enthusiastically looking forward to an engaging learning environment on campus, we are aware that COVID-19 uncertainty is also creating anxiety for some. We are certainly sensitive to the angst associated with varying levels of uncertainty, but also encouraged by the exceedingly high vaccination rate on our campus that, along with universal masking, open testing protocols, and improved indoor air filtration, will serve to safeguard our community. We remain optimistic that our community is well-prepared and the coming semester and year will be a success. Compared to a year ago when no one was vaccinated in our community and testing protocols were just being developed, we are now a community with an approximately 94% or greater vaccination rate, numerous safety measures in place, and a well-established culture of care and compliance.

An article in the 9/7/21 [NY Times](#) addressed the question: what are the chances of the average vaccinated American contracting COVID-19? *“Probably about one in 5,000 per day, and even lower for people who take precautions or live in a highly vaccinated community... In places with many fewer cases -- like the Northeast -- the chances are lower, probably less than 1 in 10,000.”* While we should not be complacent as COVID and the Delta variant in particular are a serious matter for our attention, these data along with the many measures to reduce viral transmission on our campus should give us some degree of comfort.

Over the summer, the university has taken a number of steps to address COVID-19 on campus and with the measures listed below in place, we are ready and prepared for a safe return to campus and in-person teaching and learning. Consistent with our Rhode Island and regional peer and aspirant institutions and the existing course approval processes of the Faculty Senate, we fully endorse the plan that has been in place for months that courses be offered in the modality in which they were proposed, reviewed, approved, and scheduled. Indeed, this is the modality for which students made good faith decisions to register for their classes. Also, in the interest of equity, we are sensitive to the fact that not all of our students have remote access to technology. Certainly, absent a new emergent situation, it is fair and appropriate for students to expect their classes to be offered as stated when they registered.

**Student Vaccinations** - As you know, we are requiring all students to be vaccinated or seek a medical or religious exemption. With nearly all students now accounted for, we can report an approximately 94% vaccination rate. Unvaccinated students are required to undergo [twice weekly testing](#) for early detection and prevention of transmission of the virus. Students who do not comply with this testing protocol will be referred to the Dean of Students and subject to the disciplinary process. Non-compliant students will be subject to probation and suspension.

**Faculty and Non-Classified Staff Vaccinations** - We are also pleased to announce that faculty and non-classified staff are now required to be vaccinated by October 15. As of Sunday evening, over 700 employees in this group have already uploaded their vaccination documents to the [portal](#). The high level of compliance and vaccination in our community is indeed heartening. If you have not already done so, please upload your documentation.

**Universal Indoor Masking** - We have implemented [universal indoor masking](#), with everyone in the community required to wear masks indoors until further notice. Such masking has been demonstrated to greatly impede viral transmission. While student compliance with mask-wearing in classes was not an issue last year, please be reassured that you can ask any non-compliant students that you might occasionally encounter to leave your class and refer them to the Student Conduct process.

**Classroom Improvements** - In addition to the HVAC improvements completed over the past year, including increasing air exchange rate, URI is implementing an air cleansing technology system to sanitize the air in 68 heavy use classrooms across eight of our older buildings. New buildings, such as Avedisian Hall, Beaupre Center for Chemical and Forensic Science, CBLIS, Fascitelli Center for Advanced Engineering, and Bliss Hall do not require improvements as they have high efficiency filters (MERV 13) that provide the same protection for classrooms.

**Access to Testing and Vaccinations** - [Vaccines](#) and [testing](#) (both asymptomatic and symptomatic) are routinely available to the entire URI community. While not required except for exempted individuals, all vaccinated members of the URI community are encouraged to participate in surveillance testing at no cost and as frequently as one may wish.

These aggressive steps are known to minimize viral transmission and will help safeguard the health of our community -- and we have early evidence that these measures are effective. Student athletes and Talent Development Scholars have been living on campus for the past month and taking in person classes and staff returned to working primarily on campus in early July. Thus far, we have seen no evidence of an upsurge in campus COVID cases.

Please note that in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and in alignment with CDC recommendations, we will be monitoring the COVID situation closely and will make changes as necessary and appropriate based on the latest data and/or changing conditions. As of this date, however, there are few restrictions on indoor or outdoor activities in the State of Rhode Island and both K-12 schools and colleges/universities are opening with in-person instruction. As has been the case for the past 18 months, we will maintain regular communications and consultation with the Faculty Senate, AAUP, GAU, and PTFU leadership as well as the campus community.

Finally, we trust our faculty colleagues to use your best judgment in making short-term (e.g., one or a few class meetings) adjustments to courses, if necessary, so that you can be attentive to any family health issues they may emerge at home, while also meeting our commitment to student learning and your colleagues on campus.

Once again, welcome back and best wishes for a successful, productive, and healthy semester!

c: Dr. Marc Parlange, President, URI  
Dr. Audrey Cardany, President, Faculty Senate  
Dr. Michael Rice, Vice President Faculty Senate  
Dr. Jay Walsh, Executive Director, AAUP-URI  
Dr. Miriam Reumann, President, AAUP-URI  
Ms. Danielle Dirocco, Executive Director, GAU  
Ms. Patricia Maguire, Executive Director, PTFU