

To: Peter Hans, President, UNC System

 Randall C. Ramsey, Chair, UNC System Board of Governors

From: Timothy J. Ives, Chair, UNC System Faculty Assembly

 UNC System Faculty Assembly Executive Committee

Re: Recommendations on the need for a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the UNC System

Date: July 30, 2021

The students, staff, and faculty of the University of North Carolina System look forward to returning to our campuses safely. Recent epidemiologic reports of the increasing spread of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus and the very high likelihood of additional variants (e.g., Lambda variant) highlights the importance of proper safety precautions and plans. The Delta variant is thought to be the most transmissible variant to date and may cause more severe illness. With a rapid increase in hospitalizations in the last three weeks, numerous universities across the country and several private ones in North Carolina have adopted more stringent safety measures than UNC System Institutions. Duke University and Wake Forest University provide pertinent examples of this reality in their decisions to require students to be vaccinated prior to returning to campus this fall. Additionally, Federal courts have upheld the vaccine mandate at Indiana University, a public institution. The UNC System must take more aggressive action to protect the health and lives of its students, staff, and faculty.

The current UNC System policy to not require vaccination was made prior to the emergence of the Delta variant. The lack of a vaccine requirement places significant numbers of students, staff, and faculty at risk, especially among those with pre-existing medical conditions; at present North Carolina’s overall rate of the fully vaccinated is only 43.6%. Many UNC System students, staff, and faculty do not believe the current safety measures are sufficient to protect our campuses and the surrounding communities this fall.

To return to campus-based teaching and learning safely, and as representatives of the faculty across the UNC System, we request that additional precautions (e.g., vaccination mandate, mandatory masking in all academic settings, social distancing, vaccine verification), like those implemented at Duke and Wake Forest be implemented before the start of classes for the Fall Semester. We ask for these changes to support our safe return to normal operations as the window of opportunity is closing quickly to achieve adequate antibody titers before the projected start of classes.

To that end, we ask that the UNC System request that the North Carolina Commission for Public Health consider a mandate for both COVID-19 vaccination and the wearing of masks on all campuses until this pandemic is curtailed. An example of this is the recently implemented mandate by UNC Health Care. Further, the option for continuance of hybrid-style classes should be considered, where appropriate.

The safety of our campuses is paramount, and we pledge to be full participants to achieve this goal.

cc: UNC System Faculty Senate/Council Chairs