



Extension of Remote Instruction

1 message

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To: "Campus Employees (includes College of Health Sciences Employees), All UCI Students" <zotmail@uci.edu>



A message from Chancellor Howard Gillman

Just before the holiday break in December, I wrote to you that because of a predicted surge of COVID-19 Omicron variant cases in early January, combined with the unique risks associated with many thousands of people traveling back to campus after the Winter break, we would shift to remote instruction for the first two weeks of Winter quarter, January 3 through January 14. I believed we needed this time to extensively test and assess our environment before deciding on whether a return to in-person instruction could be prudent in light of public health considerations.

Unfortunately, the results of our testing to date, combined with regional data on disease transmission and public health modeling of what is likely to happen over the next few weeks, convince me that it would be impractical to return to in-person instruction, as we had hoped, on January 18.

Accordingly, **I am extending the period of remote instruction through Friday, January 28.** Based on current information I believe we will be able to resume in-person instruction on Monday, January 31, and given the high value that we all place on a return to in-person instruction, students and faculty should plan on that being the date where we pivot from remote to in-person.

This decision is based on the following considerations:

First, in our testing just since this past Sunday we are finding a “testing positivity” rate over 13 percent. Even with our consistent guidance on best practices during the holidays, more than one out of 10 members of our community who test are testing positive for COVID-19. Just as importantly, Orange County is currently a COVID-19 hot spot, with a test positivity rate of over 25 percent. That is simply too much disease transmission both on campus and in the community to assume safe in-person interactions.

Second and relatedly, these numbers create a risk that we may not have enough healthy faculty and staff to do the work necessary to maintain fully in-person instructional operations (including housing and dining operations) if we simply return to the “new normal” a week from Monday. A return to in-person instruction is a priority, but we also must give members of our community opportunities to take care for themselves and their loved ones who become infected.

Third, if we returned to in-person instruction during the third week of the quarter, it would be inevitable that high numbers of students who would be expected to return would nevertheless become infected or would be designated a close contact and would need to quarantine or isolate. This would put a special burden on faculty to create both in-person and remote options for students. Restarting in-person instruction when large numbers of students may not be able to take advantage of it is not reasonable or fair to students or to the faculty who would need to accommodate students who could not attend in-person instruction through no fault of their own.

Fourth, models from many experts – at UCI, within the University of California, and across the country – suggest that the Omicron surge may be relatively short-lasting, with high levels especially in our area for a few weeks to be followed by a return to lower (and manageable) levels. Of course, models are not facts, but they are also not random guesses. They are based on the best scientific evidence, and the best evidence available to me at this time is that we will be able to return to in-person instruction on January 31. If information over the next two weeks calls that into question we will adjust accordingly, as we have done since the beginning of the

pandemic. (For what it is worth: I, too, am teaching a course this term, and I am planning on seeing my students in person beginning week 5 of our quarter.) Our unbelievably dedicated faculty have demonstrated since March 2020 that they are devoted to the well-being of our students, and if circumstances allow, they will also welcome the opportunity to pivot back to in-person instruction.

I understand that there are some who argue that any such safeguards are unnecessary given the prevalence of vaccinations and the apparently less severe consequences of the Omicron variant. But even those who are less concerned about the outcomes can understand the practical challenges of maintaining a fully in-person university when so many people are sick or taking care of their loved ones.

Therefore, let us give ourselves a few extra weeks to get through this surge period, with a commitment to return to in-person instruction and other activities when it is prudent to do so. For students who decided not to return to the residence halls this week, please know that it is also appropriate for you to delay your return a few more weeks. That will also take some pressure off the amazing housing and dining staff who have been so dedicated to caring for all of you, but who also would benefit from a smaller number of students to take care of over the next few weeks.

For the managers of our amazing staff: Please continue to encourage remote work through this period where feasible. The campus remains open and fully operational, but I know I can count on you to be understanding of everyone's situation and to extend grace and understanding to members of our community who are balancing their work responsibilities with their personal or family responsibilities. For a few weeks, let's help everyone do what they need to do.

One final point: I made this decision based on hard information about the reality of disease transmission on the campus and in our region. Every decision we make in the weeks to come will also be based on the availability of information we can rely on.

Thus: it is vitally important that everyone – faculty, students, and staff – who hear that they are required to test take that requirement seriously. In addition to the regular testing we have been doing for unvaccinated individuals who have received a policy-based exemption, we must also do asymptomatic testing of some percentage of our vaccinated community in order to better understand the rate of breakthrough cases. In other words, if you are instructed to test, you must test. The well-being of our community, and our ability to make evidence-based decisions on next steps, depends on your full cooperation.

Beyond this, remember you must receive your booster if you are eligible, or be non-compliant with the University's vaccination requirement; you must do the symptom checker every day; and please do not come to campus to work if you don't feel well or think you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive.

I will continue to update you as we get more information. I remain hopeful that we will be seeing each other again in person before too long.

Thank you so very much for your resilience and understanding. Stay well.

Fiat Lux,

Chancellor Howard Gillman

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